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ESL Highlights

English as a Second Language (ESL) programs provide language instruction to British Columbians whose first language is not English. ESL programs are designed to help adult learners develop language skills. These skills enable them to pursue a variety of goals such as achieving Grade 12 English equivalency, obtaining a post-secondary qualification, increasing employability and helping them participate in their communities.

The ESL Outcomes Research Project was funded by the Ministry of Advanced, Education, Training and Technology and overseen by the ESL Student Outcomes Steering Committee. The goals of this project were to develop appropriate and effective methods for conducting survey research with ESL students and then, using the lessons that were learned, assess the impact of ESL programs by surveying students who take them.

Ultimately, ESL students' survey responses are used to evaluate the quality and relevance of the public post-secondary English language training system, to develop recommendations to enhance and improve the system and create a profile of the adults who enroll in ESL programs.

This report highlights findings from two surveys conducted at 16 of BC's public post-secondary institutions in 1997 and 1998. In the fall of 1997 the first survey was conducted using an in-class questionnaire. 2330 students participated in this first survey. Approximately half of these students participated in a follow-up phone interview one year later.

The 1998 ESL Highlights, and a larger, more detailed report, profiles ESL students, their experiences and their accomplishments. Both reports are available at (www.ceiss.org/edresearch).

THE HIGHLIGHTS ANSWERS 6 MAIN QUESTIONS:

- WHO STUDIES ESL?
- WHY DO ESL STUDENTS STUDY ESL?
- HOW WELL DO ESL PROGRAMS DEVELOP LANGUAGE SKILLS?
- ARE STUDENTS SATISFIED WITH THEIR TRAINING?
- IS IT EASY FOR ADULTS TO ACCESS ESL TRAINING?
- WHAT ARE STUDENTS' TRANSITION PATTERNS?

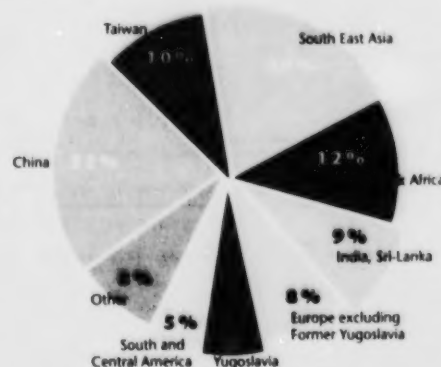
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WHO STUDIES ESL?

ESL students come from many countries and speak many languages. Ninety-nine percent were born outside of Canada, and 40 percent came from China, Taiwan or Hong Kong. The first languages of ESL students were closely related; 46 percent reported their first language was Cantonese, Mandarin, Taiwanese, Japanese, or Korean.

Sixty-nine percent of ESL students were women. With an average age of 34, students were eight years older than typical students who attended a BC College or Institute. Sixty-three percent were married, and over 52 percent had children living with them. ESL students were not necessarily newcomers; 44 percent had been in Canada at least two years.

REGION/COUNTRY OF BIRTH





ESL

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THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS WERE ASKED

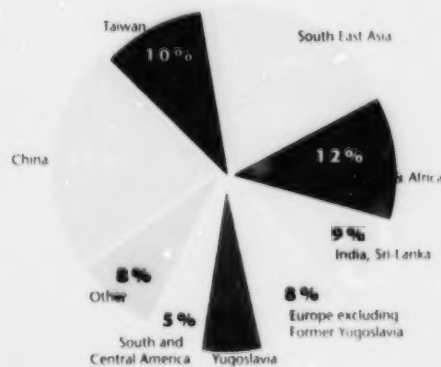
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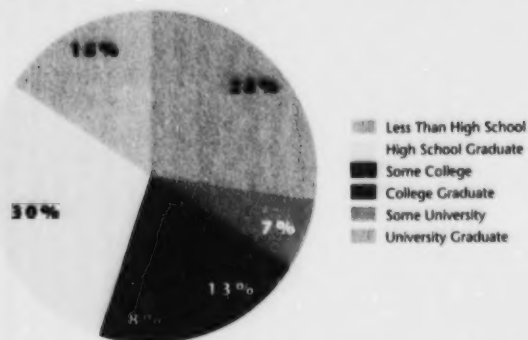
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STUDENT'S EDUCATION PRIOR TO COMING TO CANADA



Typically, ESL students came to Canada well educated and with significant work experience behind them. ESL students were more likely to be university educated than other immigrants and even BC's general population. In addition to their studies 38 percent of respondents had jobs. Students' jobs were likely to be at a lower skill level than the jobs they held in their home countries.

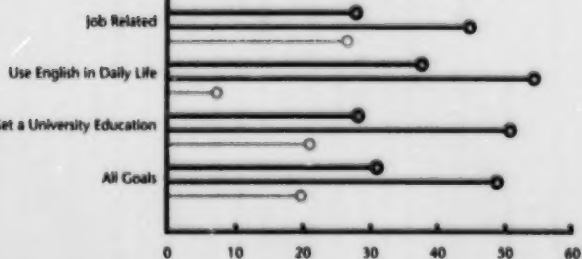
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WHY DO ESL STUDENTS STUDY ENGLISH?

Some of the main reasons ESL students enrolled in their program were to enhance their employability, to equip themselves for life in Canada, and to further their education. At the time of the second survey, 80 percent of ESL students felt they had made "much" or "some" progress towards accomplishing their goals.

The most common concern from students who made little progress was that they needed more practice speaking English.

PROGRESS BY GOAL/FALL 1998

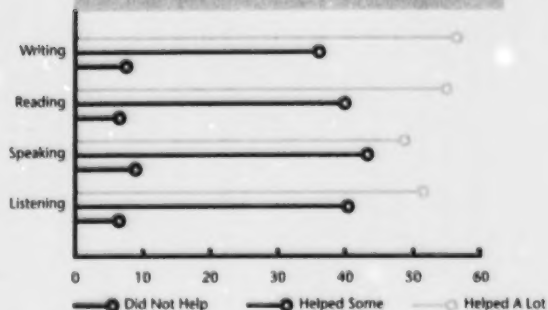


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HOW WELL DO ESL PROGRAMS DEVELOP LANGUAGE SKILLS?

One year after being surveyed, students reported that their English usage increased significantly from an average of 22 percent per day in Fall 1997 to 37 percent in Fall 1998.

EXTENT ESL HELPED IMPROVE SKILLS

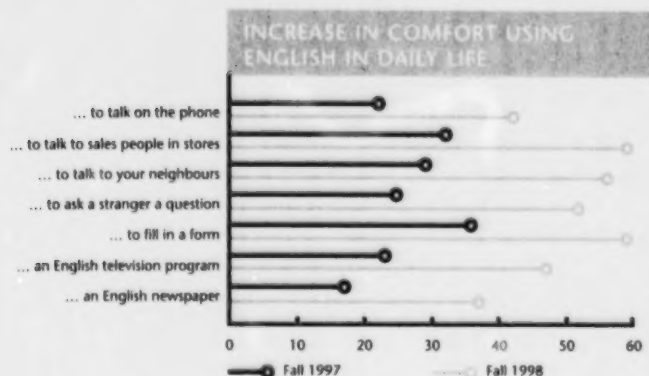


Similarly, **ninety percent felt that their ESL helped "some" or "a lot" with their English at work.** Ninety-seven percent of students who were taking non-ESL post-secondary courses said their ESL helped "some" or "a lot."

ESL students from colleges and institutes outside the Lower Mainland reported they used English most often. This was also the case for the amount of time students used English at work. Students from outside the Lower Mainland spoke English 73 percent of the time in their workplaces; Lower Mainland students spoke English 52 percent of the time. Both groups reported similar increases in English usage between 1997 and 1998. The amount of time employed students used English at work rose from 55 percent in 1997 to 62 percent in 1998, approximately twice the levels reported by all students.

Regardless of their age, all ESL students reported increases in the amount of time they spent speaking English during a typical day.

In addition to improved English usage, students' comfort using and understanding English in their daily lives increased as well.



Ninety-eight percent of students who reported improvement in their English usage and understanding also felt their training helped them "some" or "a lot" in their lives. Even students who felt they had not made progress, reported their ESL training had helped in some way.

Sixty-two percent of students felt their studies helped them meet other Canadians.

4 ARE STUDENTS SATISFIED WITH THEIR TRAINING?

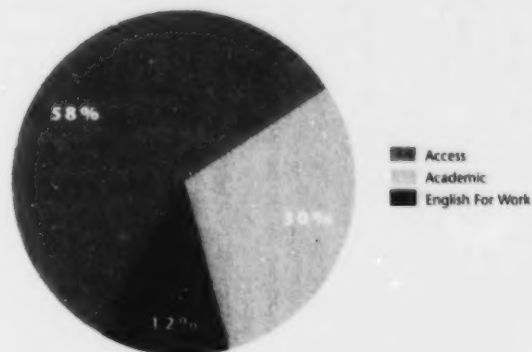
Overall, students were satisfied with their on-campus and in-class experiences. Eighty-five percent of students reported that they were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with their training. **Ninety-seven percent said they would recommend their ESL programs to others.**

The majority of students felt that the amount of time spent on other important English skills was "about right." However, 43 percent of ESL students said "not enough" time was spent developing speaking skills.

5 IS IT EASY FOR ADULTS TO ACCESS ESL TRAINING?

There are three program types which ESL students can choose from; these include Access programs, Academic programs, and English for Work programs. Access programs provide students with skills necessary to fully participate in Canadian society. Academic programs provide the skills necessary to enter post-secondary programs and English for Work programs focus on skills for specific areas of employment.

DISTRIBUTION OF FORMER ESL STUDENTS BY PROGRAM TYPE



Over 51 percent of respondents selected their ESL training institution on the basis of a personal recommendation. Once they had selected their institution, many students had to wait to get into the ESL program of their choice.

- Forty-eight percent of all ESL students had to wait before they could start.
- Students in Literacy and Beginner level programs had shorter waits.
- Fifty-five percent of students in work-related programs often waited longer than six months.

Once enrolled, nearly all students were able to get the classes they wanted. Ninety-two percent reported they were able to get "some" or "all/most" of the classes they wanted. Ninety percent of ESL students surveyed lived in the Lower Mainland.



WHAT ARE ESL STUDENTS' TRANSITION PATTERNS?

ESL students encountered many barriers to their studies: insufficient time to study, worries about finances, lack of encouragement from their families, household duties, and fear of failure. These barriers were often compounded by the fact that many students were in a period of transition, or adjustment. Forty-two percent of respondents reported they experienced a major life change while they were studying, such as changing jobs, losing jobs, having children and either getting married or divorced.

For those who were no longer taking ESL, seventy-one percent felt that they still needed further English language training and forty-seven percent planned to enroll in another ESL program within the next 12 months; most wanted to return to the same public college or institute they had attended in 1997.

ABOUT THE ESL STUDENT OUTCOMES PROJECT

The ESL Student Outcomes Survey Project was conducted with funding from the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology and coordinated by the Advanced Education Council of British Columbia (AECBC), and later by the Centre for Education Information (CEISS). The project was overseen by the ESL Student Outcomes Steering Committee, which included members from public institutions and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology.

The survey results are used:

- To examine the effectiveness of ESL programs;
- To develop recommendations for improving program content and delivery;
- To develop a profile of students who are currently served;

MORE INFORMATION

The Centre for Education Information currently manages several distinct projects that measure Student Outcomes in British Columbia's post-secondary and K-12 education systems. The goal of these projects is to collect and disseminate information about former students' post-secondary experiences and their subsequent labour market and further education experiences.

If you would like more information about Student Outcomes reports, please contact

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TEL 250-413-4400
WWW.CEISS.ORG



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ESL Students:**

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Introduction

This report presents the findings of the final phases of the three-part English as a Second Language (ESL) Student Outcomes Project. Initiated by the Advanced Education Council of British Columbia in 1995, the project was funded by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, managed by the Centre for Education Information and overseen by the ESL Student Outcomes Provincial Steering Committee.

ESL programs provide language instruction at the literacy, beginner, intermediate, advanced and college preparatory levels to British Columbians whose first language is not English. ESL programs are designed to help learners develop the knowledge and skills they need to pursue a wide variety of goals, such as:

- pursuing further education in vocational, career/technical and academic programs;
- entering the work force;
- achieving Grade 12 equivalency; and
- acquiring the English language skills necessary to participate more fully in Canadian society.

Project Goals

In addition to their language needs, ESL students deal with many issues, including settlement in their new country, retraining, lack of confidence, employment, or lack thereof. Student success, therefore, is more than just progress through levels in the college programs; success can best be measured by students' perceptions of their improvement and attainment of their goals. Hence, improvements in language were not tracked; rather, students' perceptions of their improvement, their frequency using English and their comfort with the language were tracked.

3 Main Objectives

- Assess students' perceptions of the effectiveness of ESL programs in BC;
- Develop a profile of ESL students attending public institutions; and
- Develop questions for further discussion and recommendations.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Project Description

The ESL Outcomes Project consisted of three phases.

A) Leavers Study

In June 1996 a telephone survey was conducted with students who had taken ESL classes in public colleges in 1995 and had left the program. During this phase of the project 1404 students were interviewed to gain information on their experiences and to experiment with using a telephone survey with this population.

B) Pilot Study

Four colleges took part in this second phase of the project. It was conducted to inform the full study and consisted of an in-class survey in the fall of 1996 and was followed by a qualitative, focus group study one month later and three phone surveys at 6, 12 and 18 months.

*Parts A and B were intended to provide information on survey design, survey questions, and tracking methods to direct the full study.

C) Full Study (This Report)

The full study consists of two integrated parts: an analysis of the quantitative data produced by in-class and telephone surveys administered in 1997 and 1998, respectively, and a focus group study of current and former ESL students in mid-1999. This document combines a number of research styles and has been written by a number of people from a number of viewpoints. These diverse styles are evident in the writing.

Quantitative Data

Approximately 2,330 domestic ESL students participated in the initial in-class questionnaire in the fall of 1997. Of these students, 66.8 percent volunteered to participate in a follow-up telephone interview. Of those students who were interviewed as part of the initial survey 1,221 were ultimately contacted by telephone in the fall of 1998. At the time of the initial survey all students interviewed were enrolled in an ESL program at one of British Columbia's 16 public post-secondary institutions. When interviewed a year later, some of those previously interviewed were still studying, while others were not.

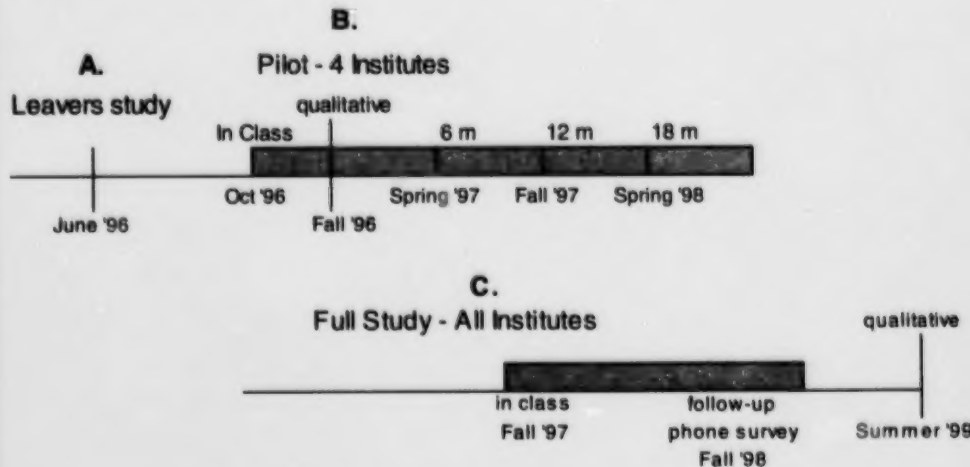
Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

The in-class survey was relatively short and collected general information about the nature and duration of ESL studies; this included students' use, comfort, and proficiency with English, reasons for studying ESL, employment and previous education and first languages spoken. The follow-up telephone survey collected more detailed information on the following themes: continuing ESL studies; duration of ESL studies; reasons for leaving ESL; use, comfort, and proficiency with English; further (non ESL) education; reasons for studying ESL; achievement of goals; satisfaction with ESL programs; life changes; employment; and finances.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative data came from focus groups that were done with students and former students from eight public post-secondary institutions in BC in mid-1999. The purpose of the focus group study was to gain a deeper understanding of ESL students and their experiences, aspirations, difficulties and successes while enrolled in English language studies.

Project Time-Line



Summary of Findings

Overall, the public ESL training system is serving ESL students well.

Students are satisfied with their ESL experience and nearly every student would recommend the program to someone else. Eighty-five percent of ESL students reported they were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with their training and 90 percent felt that their training helped "a lot" or "some" with their language skills. Students are more comfortable using English in a variety of common situations. Similarly, 80 percent of students felt they had made "much" or "some" progress towards accomplishing their goals. Satisfaction with progress is greater for students with higher education levels.

Students who enrol in ESL classes come from a wide range of countries and speak a great number of languages.

Ninety-nine percent of ESL students were born outside of Canada. Forty percent came from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Similarly, nearly half of all ESL students reported their first language was either Cantonese, Mandarin, Taiwanese or Korean. ESL students come to Canada well educated (84 percent had graduated from high school and 28 percent had a university degree) and possess considerable job skills (43 percent held jobs requiring a university education prior to Coming to Canada).

People study ESL to be more employable, participate in Canadian life and further their education.

Forty-nine percent of ESL students said their main reason for studying ESL was work-related. "To be able to use English in daily life" (24%) and "to pursue further education" (23%) were other common reasons students had for enrolling in ESL programs. Younger students tended to focus on furthering their education, while older students were more concerned with improving their English for daily life.

Sixty-six percent of students have to wait longer than three months to get the classes that they want.

Nearly half of ESL students had to wait before they could start their program. Students in literacy and beginner level programs had shorter waits, while students in work-related programs usually had to wait longer. However, once enrolled, 92 percent of students reported they were able to get "some" or "all / most" of the classes they wanted. The majority of students choose where to study ESL on the basis of a personal recommendation. If they subsequently change institutions, it is likely for reasons of convenience.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Students' evaluation of their on-campus and in-class experiences are generally positive; however, many identify a need for a greater emphasis on speaking skills. Forty percent also report that they seldom receive assistance from college employees other than their teachers: for many students their teachers are their only source of support.

ESL students face similar problems to most adults who return to school. Insufficient time to study, worries about finances, lack of encouragement from family members, household duties, and fear of failure are common problems. These reasons may help explain why some students are not likely to continue with their ESL studies. Although many hope to resume their studies, less than half of students continue to take any form of ESL a year later after leaving their initial program. Of students who were no longer taking ESL, 71% felt they still needed more English language training. Similarly, 42% of students reported they experienced a major life change while they were studying such as changing or losing jobs, having children and either getting married or divorced. Although many students hope to resume their studies, less than half of them continue to take any form of ESL a year later.

Overall, this analysis of ESL student experiences, from Fall 1997 and Fall 1998 survey results, indicates that the system is providing the majority of students with the skills they need to achieve their goals. Student satisfaction might increase if certain problem areas are addressed: shortened waiting times to enter programs and a stronger emphasis on speaking skills across all programs and at all levels are two of the most significant areas of concern.

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Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

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Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

1. ESL Student Profile

WHO ARE ESL STUDENTS?

ESL students come from a wide range of countries and speak diverse first languages.

Almost all the students (99%) were born outside of Canada. Forty percent came from the China, Taiwan or Hong Kong. The next most often reported countries of birth were Iran, India, Vietnam, and the former Yugoslavia.

Figure 1
Region/Country of Birth



Closely related to country of birth is first language; 45 percent reported that their first language was East Asian (Cantonese, Mandarin, Taiwanese, Japanese, or Korean).

Figure 2
Language Group²



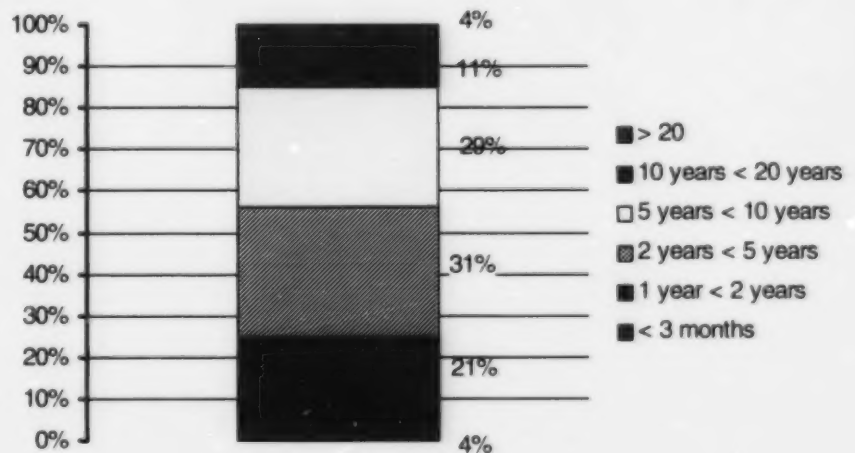
²See Appendix 3 for detailed information on languages included in groups

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Twenty percent of ESL students had Canadian citizenship in Fall 1997. Of those who did not, nearly all (96%) had landed immigrant status.

At the time of the in-class survey, students varied widely in how long they had lived in Canada; most, however, were relatively new arrivals, having lived in Canada for two years or less (56%). Only four percent had lived in Canada for less than three months.

Figure 3
Time in Canada



Many ESL students are in a period of transition or adjustment.

While studying ESL, 42 percent of students reported experiencing a major life change. Of those, 53 percent moved to a new home, 34 percent changed jobs, 19 percent lost their jobs, 23 percent had a child and 16 percent either got married or divorced.

Most ESL students are married and have children.

Sixty-three percent of students were married. Fifty-two percent had children aged under 19 living with them. Of these students, 70 percent reported that while they attended ESL classes, they "seldom or never" had a problem finding someone to care for their children.

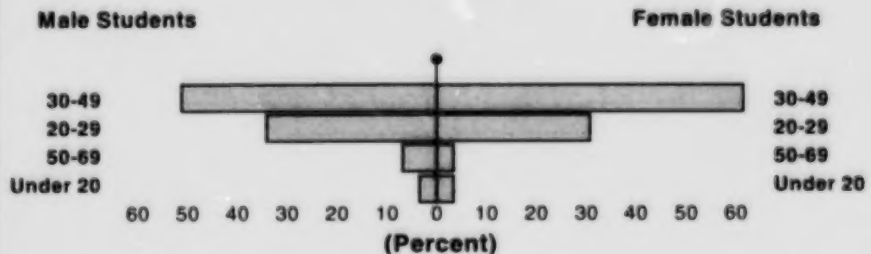
Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

ESL students are older than the overall population of the BC College System and are more likely to be women.

When surveyed in Fall '97, ESL students' ages ranged from 16 to 77, with an average of age of 34. As might be expected, this is substantially older than the mean age of 26 years for all former students from BC's colleges and institutes.

Over 69 percent of ESL students who responded to the '97 survey were women. The age distributions were roughly similar for men and women.

**Figure 4
Age / Gender Pyramid**



ESL students live in multi-person households.

Although over 35 percent of ESL students were single, widowed or divorced, only five percent lived alone.

Nearly half of all ESL students have friends for whom English is not a second language.

In Fall '97, 44 percent of ESL students reported that they had friends who were native English speakers; a year later this rose to 52 percent.

Many ESL students balance jobs with their studies.

In Fall '97 nearly 38 percent of ESL students worked while they studied ESL. About 64 percent of them had their job prior to starting their program. Students in work-related programs (48%) were more likely to have a job while they studied.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Job rates were higher for students who were no longer studying ESL (47%) in Fall '98 compared to those who continued their formal ESL training (39%). In Fall '98, 64 percent of those who were working and not continuing their ESL studies had full time jobs, compared to 59 percent of those who were continuing their ESL studies.

Most (93%) of those who were working in Fall '98 planned to continue working; 61 percent planned to change jobs. Fifty-one percent of students in work oriented programs who planned to continue working did not plan to change jobs.

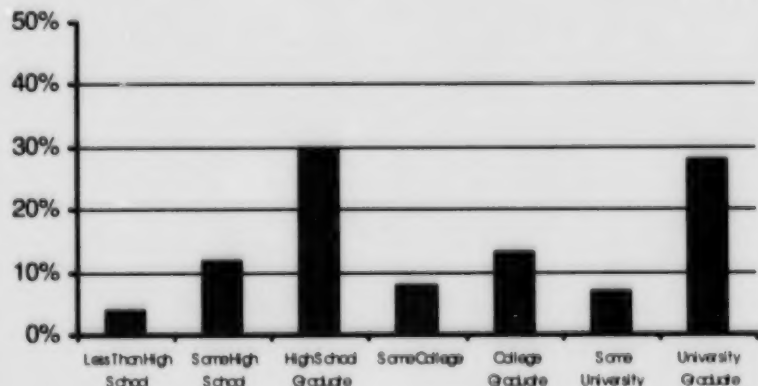
WHAT SKILLS AND
EXPERIENCE DO THEY
BRING FROM THEIR HOME
COUNTRIES?

ESL students are well educated and have significant work experience prior to coming to Canada.

Eighty-four percent of ESL students had graduated from high school before coming to Canada and 28 percent had a university degree. According to a research report "Enhancing Opportunity" (1997), 11 percent of the entire British Columbia population has a university degree, and 19 percent of all immigrants have a university degree.³ As such, ESL students are more likely to be university educated than both the overall immigrant population and the general BC population.

Figure 5

Highest Education Attained in Home Country



Prior to coming to Canada, 71 percent of ESL students had a job, of which 92 percent were full-time (30 or more hours per week).

³ Spigelman, M., and Gibbons, A. (1997) 'Enhancing Opportunity, Meeting the Employment Training Needs of Recent Immigrants to British Columbia.' Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Immigration, www.mrmi.gov.bc.ca

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

How do ESL Students' Current Jobs Compare with Work Done Before Coming to Canada?

Students who work while taking ESL are likely to be in jobs requiring lower skill levels than the jobs they held in their home countries.

Comparing the skill levels of jobs held by students working in Fall '98 and Fall '97 with their skill levels before coming to Canada illustrates how immigration may affect ESL students' employability and ability to find equivalent level work in BC. The skill level data presented here should be approached with caution due to the complexities of coding occupations between countries.

For students who worked prior to coming to Canada, in Fall '97 and Fall '98, 43 percent held Skill Level A jobs, requiring a university education. In Fall '97, the percentage of students in jobs requiring this same skill level had dropped to five percent. By Fall '98 the number of students who had found jobs requiring this skill level had risen slightly to 13 percent.

Table 1
Pre-Canada, Fall '97 and Fall '98 / Comparison of Job Skill Level
(includes students employed at all three times only = 559 Students)

	Prior to Coming to Canada - Fall '98		
	Job prior coming to Canada	Fall '97 jobs while taking ESL	Fall '98 jobs includes those no longer taking ESL
Management Level	7%	4%	0%
Skill Level A: Requires University Degree	43%	5%	13%
Skill Level B: Requires completion of College or Apprenticeship training with some supervisory duties and responsibilities	35%	41%	44%
Skill Level C: Requires up to four years of secondary school and up to two years of on-the- job training or equivalent experience	13%	42%	31%
Skill Level D: Requires up to 2 years of secondary school	2%	9%	11%

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

The demographic information in the ESL Student Profile provides us with data about adult ESL students in British Columbia. The descriptions of their experiences adjusting to life in Canada as quoted in the following qualitative section helps to breathe life into those statistics.

NOTE:

Quotations of ESL students have been used to illustrate the main points of the discussion and to convey the sentiment and context for the opinions expressed. These verbatim statements have been italicized.

(QUALITATIVE)
HOW WELL DO ESL
STUDENTS ADJUST TO
LIFE IN CANADA?

Participants were asked a few questions about life in Canada. Is life in Canada different from what you thought it would be like? Is there anything you wish you had known about Canada before coming here? How has your life changed since coming to Canada? The discussions on these topics covered many aspects of participants' individual circumstances and perceptions. (Invariably, the weather or climate of BC or Canada was commented on during this part of the discussions.) Most of the students volunteered positive statements about Canada and Canadians, and then many of them went on to talk about the difficulties of their adjustment to a new country and a new way of life. Some were finding it easier to cope now that they could communicate in English, had found work, or had decided on a new career path. Others were still struggling to find their way.

They were eager to share their thoughts on what they found most difficult, how they thought they were doing now as compared with soon after their arrival, and where they wanted to be in a few years time. These questions required the expression of "big thoughts on big issues", and any language difficulties they had were most evident when they described their experiences as immigrants and their feelings about how this profound change in their lives had affected them and their families. Even so, it was possible to discern certain common themes. If adaptation to an overwhelming life change is at least partly dependent on coming to a personal understanding of that experience, then many of the people in these focus groups were making progress in this long process. It was apparent that they were thinking about their experiences and trying to understand them.

Economic survival and feeling comfortable with the culture were two major challenges for them, and evidence of having made progress on these goals was how many of them measured their success in Canada. Achieving the ability to communicate in English was a major step in feeling comfortable with the culture. Unfortunately, both economic survival and the ability to communicate in English were proving to be more difficult than had been expected, and were intertwined in ways that produced dilemmas. Some were caught in a "vicious circle" involving work and language, and others were set on a linear course involving many discrete steps over a period of years to reach their goal of gainful employment. All were feeling the pressure of time.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Following are a few statements that capture the nature of common dilemmas. These statements were not uttered by anyone in the groups per se, but have been distilled from the discussions for illustrative purposes. "I can't get a job if I don't know English, but I can't continue my studies until I have a job so I can pay for my studies." "It takes years to get through ESL, and I can't begin re-training for a job until I finish some, most, all of ESL - it's endless." "I have children, I have a job, and I go to school - I don't have any time left for studying or doing homework." Having to deal with the day-by-day demands of economic survival in an unfamiliar culture, all while learning a new language had left some of them resigned to a difficult life for themselves in exchange for a hopeful future for their children. "I don't know if things will ever be better for me, but maybe things will be better for my children."

In their own words, some examples of what they had to say about life in Canada:

Canada is kind for the immigrant...

Canadians very friendly.

Canada as a country is a very good place to live. I surprised by friendly people... even if you don't know people.... they talk to you and make you feel comfortable... I was going to go back to my country but was happy here, so I stayed. I applied to get citizenship...

... My life was upside down. I have to start over. I didn't want to talk to people, I was afraid they wouldn't understand me. I said to myself, I'm not going to talk to people unless I know how to talk to people properly. I wanted to be perfect, that was my problem.

A lot of opportunities, but it's harder. It's easier when you got a job and are working, it's easier to accomplish something, but it's harder to start to learn English.

I study and study and hopefully in a year I will be able to go into some course to focus on a job, and my life will start to change.

When I finished university in my country I expected to work for years. But now I have to go to school again.

In ____, people who sit on a chair got more money; here, people who work with hands got more money. Here, people don't interfere with each other's life... quality of life is better here. We have to work hard here.

The most important and good thing about Canada is, let's us keep our culture and have Canadian culture. I really like here, because many problem travelling, moving from country to other country is very hard. When we came here we start from under the beginning, so it is very hard for us with family...

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

I didn't expect that I would have so many problems, to be a professional _____. I must spend at least three years passing exams, but I can't get this before training for two years. There is no end, and I get frustrated.

The process of integration in Canadian society is very hard. Not open discrimination, but lots of obstacles in our way to get jobs, go to university, and some of these obstacles are for no reason. You must forget everything you had before – education, experience, everything if you are ready to begin a new life.

Basically, when I came here - as many other immigrants - I faced many problems. The environment was quite different from my home country, the organization of the country and the culture, the rules, regulations, ... the way people think...

A few students felt they had been misled about their employability in Canada by people working in Canadian embassy offices. They said that before they arrived in this country they had a positive impression of the general availability of jobs, the availability of jobs in their fields, or on their prospects for continuing to work in their fields given their experience and credentials. *Sometimes promises are made in other people's countries... They showed Vancouver - beaches, no rain, and they guaranteed these skilled people... once they came to this country they would immediately find a job if they learned English.* The inability to continue working in their chosen field without first acquiring Canadian training, certification, experience, etc. was a significant barrier for many to overcome. Someone in two of the groups defended the practice of thorough examination of new Canadians' credentials. They reasoned that qualifications for certain jobs should match Canadian standards, and it was only fair that immigrants would be expected to have the same qualifications as people who were born here.

The reality of the job market and not having their credentials and work experience recognized was causing a few to question the wisdom of their decision to immigrate. One of these students was visibly angry at the financial situation she and her family found themselves in. A person who came to this country as a refugee said she doesn't have the choice to stay or return to her home country, but she knew others from her ethnic community who had returned after finding life in Canada too difficult. Another student volunteered the information that the net increase in the population of Canada due to immigration is actually very small, because many immigrants return to their home countries or go elsewhere, because of the financial difficulties they encounter here.

In retrospect, some students wished they had been better informed before they immigrated. While a few may have come to a different decision, others said realistic information would have allowed proper preparation, such as saving more money to cover a possibly long transition period to employment or switching to occupations that were in demand in Canada. Only one participant described extensive personal research on Canada prior to immigration.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

While he waited a year for paperwork to be completed so he could immigrate, he read books and media reports, talked to tourists, and said he had 60 to 70% of the most important information he needed to know before he arrived. He also said he was *psychologically ready*, that the year of waiting gave him time for mental preparation. While his research took place after he had made the decision to immigrate, he said Canada was much as he expected - only the climate had been a surprise, because it was something that had to be experienced first-hand.

Clearly, some people felt they lacked important information on the difficulty they would likely face in earning a living in Canada, and, consequently, they were not prepared for the changes that would affect every aspect of their lives. It was beyond the scope of this study to explore their thoughts any further on where the responsibility rests for becoming informed. The freedom of individuals in democracies to make decisions for themselves was mentioned several times as an example of a cultural difference that required an adjustment in the thinking of newcomers. What some of them seemed to be saying was that how to think and behave in a culture of freedom does not come naturally to a person who has grown up in a country where the government and/or religious leaders tell the people what to do. Nor does freedom come naturally to a person who has been taught that the well being of the family or the community is more highly valued than the well being of the individual.

I asked for nothing and was promised nothing, and it was my choice to come here.

I wish I knew that it is difficult to make money here. I would have made more money in ____ first, then after that I would have come here.

If you are told by ambassador in ____, that right away you can get a job, but I couldn't, and it was a big shock for me.

I am wondering why they bring immigrant people here if they don't give us any chance job, education... We lost everything here, and still we don't have any job.... It's not fair.

The reshaping of personal identity in a new culture was discussed in detail in one group. One of the younger participants had thought a great deal about the identity crisis he had endured when he came to Canada and was able to communicate what this experience had been like for him. He said he had two identities for a while, one for his family and friends from his ethnic community and another for his Canadian friends. He compared it to *wearing a mask*, and said the process was similar to that of a pre-teen learning to read the cues of body language, the social rules of dating, etc., *all by trial and error. Your old personality is dying, it is getting old, and your new personality is pretty young...* He said that the feelings of unease and insecurity that accompany this process *cause depression*.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Perhaps the analogy of adolescence seems especially fitting, because children and youth appear to be better equipped than adults to handle major adjustments. In other words, learning the social rules that guide acceptable behaviour is what kids are doing anyway during those early developmental years, regardless of whether they remain in the culture in which they were born or are transplanted to a new one. Another reason why younger people were said to have an easier period of adaptation following immigration was the fact that they have their parents and other adults to support and protect them during the transition period.

It's like I'm dead and reborn here... a new identity, exactly. In most eastern countries, an individual is not an individual, everyone is dependent on what is going on around them. He has to be a husband, a brother, a good _____ for government, a good son and provide parents with service, and, if there is any time left, he can be for himself. The attitude here is: the individual is everything. For the first time, here I can study what I like. Before I was told what to study. As an individual, I can say what I want, decide for my future, follow my own passions in life, be me first, then give to others...

Here the decision-maker is you, you don't have any fear. Police is quite different. Here police can act only in their authority. A wealthy country, but wealth is not distributed on a fair basis. When you come here, you have to start everything... from the zero point...

You actually have to leave everything behind. You are a new person, you are a new identity. You have to start from the first step.

An idea that cropped up in different ways a number of times but was never fully articulated (although attempted) was that thinking and verbal communication are completely "out of sync" while learning a second language. To be aware that the quality of one's thinking is not reflected in the words one speaks is very painful to some people. It is frustrating because the full thought has not been communicated to others, but also humiliating for those who have been recognized in the past for their ability to reason and express their reasoning verbally or in writing. One well-educated participant described his former high social status and then likened the quality of his speaking (in English) to that of a child. Many of the participants had families, so it was natural that children were never far from their thoughts. It was interesting, though, how often children were mentioned in a variety of contexts. It was as if the analogy of the child was the sub-text for the psychological experience of an adult learning a second language in an unfamiliar culture.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Language development begins in infancy and cruises along during the early childhood years as a largely unconscious process. Probably most people regard as effortless the learning of their first language. In contrast, an adult learning a second language is engaging in a very conscious process that requires a great deal of focused attention and effort. It is likely that the experience of learning a second language as an integral part of adapting to an unfamiliar culture causes some adults to feel like a child again in uncomfortable ways. These themes, which are also characteristic of childhood, were apparent in the discussions and were causing discomfort: reduced social status and power, less control over one's destiny, a limited ability to communicate one's needs and ideas to others, and frequent feelings of bewilderment.

DISCUSSION

Adjustment to Life in Canada

Adult ESL students obviously deal with many settlement issues beyond the purely academic acquisition of a new language. ESL programs strive to balance the varying needs of students who have many responsibilities outside of school with the discipline needed to ensure that progress in learning is taking place. Compromises are sometimes necessary. Homework may be late. Students may be distracted and attendance may be poor. This may not mean that the students do not take schoolwork seriously, but that their lives are too complicated for them to devote themselves to their studies. It is important to bear this in mind when looking at short term outcomes, as we are in this study.

2. Access to ESL Training

WHERE ARE ESL
STUDENTS LOCATED IN
THE PROVINCE OF BC?

The vast majority of ESL students in BC are located in the Lower Mainland.

ESL studies are offered at 17 public post-secondary institutions across the province of BC.⁴ Consistent with immigrant settlement patterns, 90 percent of students who responded to the Fall 1997 survey attended institutions in the Lower Mainland. A large majority (67%) of all ESL students in BC were at Vancouver Community College when surveyed in Fall 1997.

Table 2
ESL Studies by College and Institute

College or Institute	Percent
BCIT	3%
Camosun College	4%
Capilano College	4%
Douglas College	4%
University College of the Fraser Valley	6%
Kwantlen University College	7%
Malaspina University College	1%
College of New Caledonia	1%
North Island College	1%
Northern Lights College	<1%
Northwest Community College	<1%
Okanagan University College	1%
Open Learning Agency	<1%
College of the Rockies	<1%
University College of the Cariboo	1%
Vancouver Community College	67%
Total	100%

WHAT PROBLEMS DO
ESL STUDENTS FACE
DURING THEIR TRAINING?

Financial problems, not having time to study, lack of encouragement from family and fear of failure are some of the most significant problems ESL students face.

Thirty-nine percent of students reported that they "always/most of the time" or "sometimes" felt fear of failing in their program. Twenty-two percent "always/most of the time" felt their families did not encourage them. Sixteen percent had to deal with their own health problems or the health of someone in their family.

⁴ Sixteen colleges and institutes are included in this analysis. Selkirk College was not included due to a small domestic ESL student population.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Forty-four percent of students "always/most of the time" or "sometimes" had problems finding enough time to study away from their classes. Just under 32 percent "always/most of the time" or "sometimes" had problems finding a quiet place to study at home.

Transportation to school was not a problem for 84 percent of students. Getting chores done at home was "always/most of the time" or "sometimes" a problem for 34 percent of students. Finances were "sometimes" a problem for 27 percent of students and "always/most of the time" a problem for about 13 percent of students.

Finances were more of a problem for some groups of students than for others. For example, 23 percent of students from Literacy programs said finances were "always/most of the time" a problem, compared to 13 percent for all students. Although the number of students was very low, 53 percent of those with no schooling prior to coming to Canada had financial problems "always/most of the time".

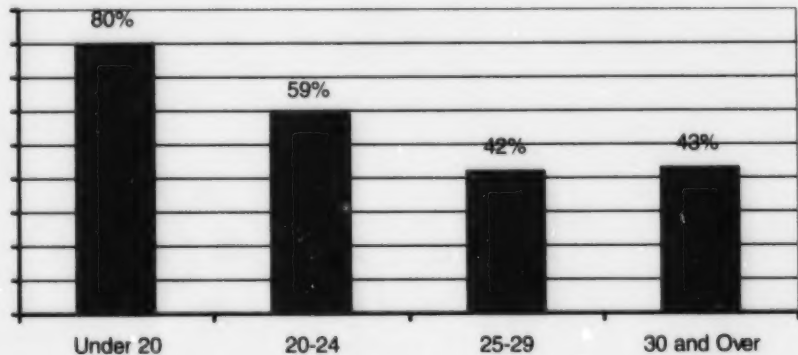
Table 3
Student Financial Problems by Highest Education Attained in Home Country

Highest Education Attained in Home Country	% Who "Always / Most of the Time" had Financial Problems
No Formal Education	53%
Elementary School	26%
Some High School	22%
High School Graduate	12%
Some College	11%
College Graduate	13%
Some University	5%
University Graduate	12%
Overall	13%

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Students under 25 years of age had the least trouble with finances. The likelihood that students had financial problems "always/most of the time" increased with age. Increased family responsibility may be an explanation for this observed pattern.

Figure 6
% of Students who had Enough Money by Age



HOW DO STUDENTS CHOOSE WHERE TO TAKE THEIR ESL TRAINING?

Over half of ESL students select their ESL training institution based on a personal recommendation.

Although students gave a wide range of reasons for selecting a specific college or institute, three reasons were reported by more than 10 percent of students. Approximately half made their selection on the basis of a recommendation by a friend, family member, or neighbour; 29 percent said convenience was the main reason; and 20 percent said they made their selection based on the institution's reputation.

A small number of students study ESL at more than one college or institute at the same time.

In Fall '97, 14 percent of students were taking ESL at more than one college or institute at the same time. Of these students, 36 percent were studying at private post secondary colleges, 26 percent at other public institutions, and 20 percent through the school board.

"Convenience" is the most common reason for changing institution.

Four reasons were cited for changing to a different college for ESL studies by more than 10 percent of those students who switched schools between Fall '97 and Fall '98. These were convenience (19%), lower program cost (11%), desire for a specific course at the new college (12%), or because the student was taking other (non-ESL) courses at the new college (12%).

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

HOW EASY IS IT FOR STUDENTS TO ACCESS ESL PROGRAMS?

Nearly one half of all ESL students have to wait before getting into an ESL program.

Forty-eight percent of all students had to wait to get into the ESL program of their choice.⁵ Of those who waited, 33 percent waited less than three months, 34 percent waited three to six months and 33 percent waited over six months. Interestingly, when asked how their training could be improved, only seven percent of students mentioned shorter wait lists.

Of students who had to wait:

- those in work related programs (*Combined Skills* and *Vocational ESL* programs) had to wait longer to get the programs they wanted; 55% of them had to wait longer than six months.
- students in *Literacy* and *Beginner* level programs had shorter waits.
- federally funded programs had much shorter waits than provincially funded programs. No one in a federally funded program waited more than six months.
- wait times were slightly greater for students aged 30 to 49.
- the longer students had lived in Canada, the longer they waited for ESL training.

Do ESL STUDENTS GET ALL THE CLASSES THEY WANT?

Nearly all students are able to get "some" or "all/most" of the classes they want.

Reflecting on their ESL experiences, 92% of students reported they were able to get "some" or "all/most" of the classes they wanted. Class availability did not depend significantly on demographics (age, sex, education level, country of birth, time in Canada, program level, program type, and program size).

Table 4
How are Students Distributed through the System?

Program Level	Percent
Literacy	3%
Beginner	20%
Intermediate	35%
Advanced	25%
Academic / College Preparation	18%
All Levels	100%

⁵ The survey did not capture whether students chose, or were forced by other reasons, to wait.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

The program type refers to the primary purpose of the program. *Access* programs provide students with basic skills to participate fully in Canadian society. *Academic* programs provide the skills necessary to enter post-secondary programs. *English for Work* programs prepare students for the workplace; including combined skills and vocational ESL programs which focus on skills for specific areas of employment.

The majority of students (58%) were in Access programs and 30 percent were preparing for post-secondary programs by taking ESL Academic programs. A smaller percentage took work-related programs.

Table 5
Distribution of Former ESL Students by Program Type

Program	Percent
Access	58%
Academic	30%
English for Work	12%
All Programs	100%

HOW DO ESL STUDENTS BALANCE SCHOOL, WORK AND FINANCES?

ESL students juggle many responsibilities while taking language training.

When surveyed in Fall '97, ESL students dedicated significant amounts of time to their studies. Sixty percent of ESL students spent 10 or more hours per week studying and 19 percent spent 20 hours or more per week.

In addition to studying ESL, 38 percent of students also had a job in Fall '97. Fifty percent of these students were working full-time (30 or more hours per week). Most students who worked full-time still managed to find time in their schedules for 10 or more hours of ESL studies per week. Five percent of ESL students managed 20 or more hours of ESL studies per week in addition to working full-time.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

The funding source identifies how institutions funded program delivery. Students' tuition pays either a portion or the full cost of the program. In situations where tuition only covers a portion of the program cost, the institution receives additional funding from the provincial or federal government. Appendix 1 provides more details regarding the definitions of program level, type and funding source.

Table 6
Distribution of ESL Students by Funding Source

Funding Source	Percent
Provincial Base	81%
Federal CIC including LINC	12%
Full Fee Payers	4%
Other	2%
All Sources	100%

Overall, 22 percent of students reported not having enough money while taking ESL. Financial concerns were somewhat greater for older students. Nearly 23 percent of students aged 30 and over felt they did not have enough money compared to 18 percent who were under 25.

Sources of student funding for ESL training varied. Fifty-nine percent were self-supporting; this included 28 percent relying on support from their family and 31 percent using their own income or savings. Another 27 percent reported using the Adult Basic Education Student Assistance Program (ABESAP) as their main source of funding. Some students supplemented their main source of funding with other types of government assistance.

Table 7
How Students Paid For Their ESL Studies

Main Source of Funding for ESL Studies	Percent
Work/Employment/Own Savings	31%
Family Support	28%
ABESAP	27%
Income Assistance	9%
Other Sources	7%
All Sources	100%

WHY DO STUDENTS
STUDY ESL?

3. Reasons for Taking ESL and Goal Attainment

ESL students aim to be more employable, participate in Canadian life and become better educated.

Forty-eight percent of students said their main reason for taking ESL was related to their current or future employment. The top four main reasons for taking ESL, reported in Fall '97, were "to get a job or better job" (29%), "to use English in daily activities" (24%), "to get a university education" (23%) and "to go on to a job training course" (16%).

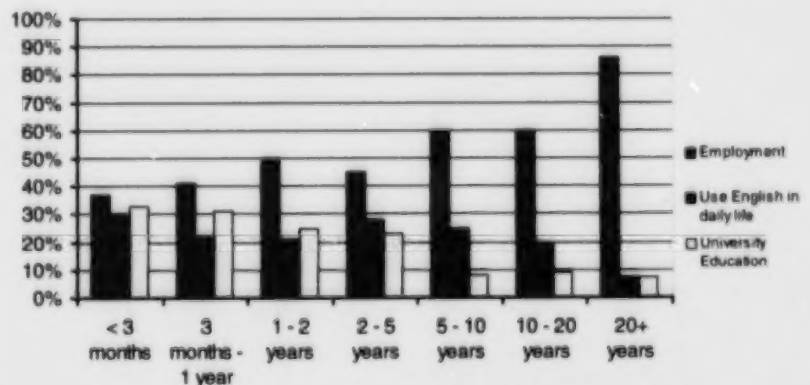
Table 8
Main Reason For Taking ESL

Main Reason for Taking ESL	Percent
Employment Related*	48%
To be able to use English in daily life	24%
To get a University Education	23%
To go on to Adult Basic Education	3%
Miscellaneous reasons	3%
Total	100%

* "To go to a job training course", "To get a job or better job", and "To help with the job you have now".

Relatively recent arrivals were more likely to stress "using English in daily activities" and "getting a university education" as goals. Employment related goals were more common among ESL students who had been in Canada for a longer period of time.

Figure 7
Main Reason for Studying ESL by Time in Canada

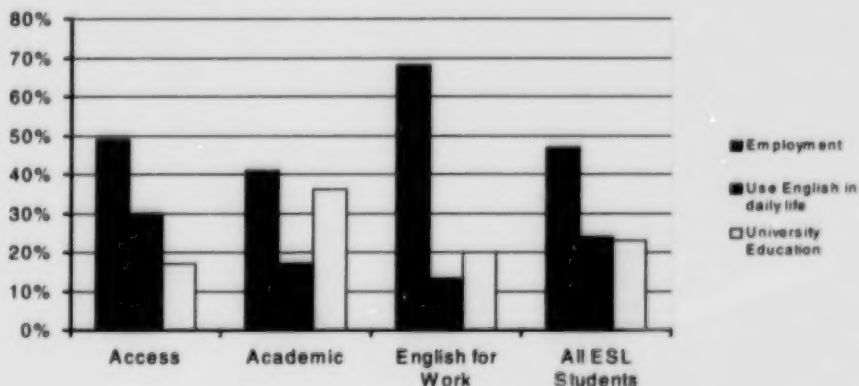


Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Reasons students take ESL training vary by program type.

Not surprisingly, students from different programs emphasize different reasons for studying ESL. Employment-related goals were higher for students in workplace oriented programs (76% for *Work: Vocational ESL* and 60% for *Work: Combined Skills*). Students in *Access* programs reported "To use English in daily life" as their main goal. Students in *Academic* programs reported "To get a university education" as their main goal. Forty-nine percent of *Access* students and 41 percent of *Academic* students had an employment related main goal.

Figure 8
Main Reason for Studying ESL by Program Type



DO THEIR REASONS FOR TAKING ESL CHANGE OVER TIME?

The majority of students who continued to study ESL in Fall '98 changed the main reason for studying ESL they reported a year earlier in Fall '97.

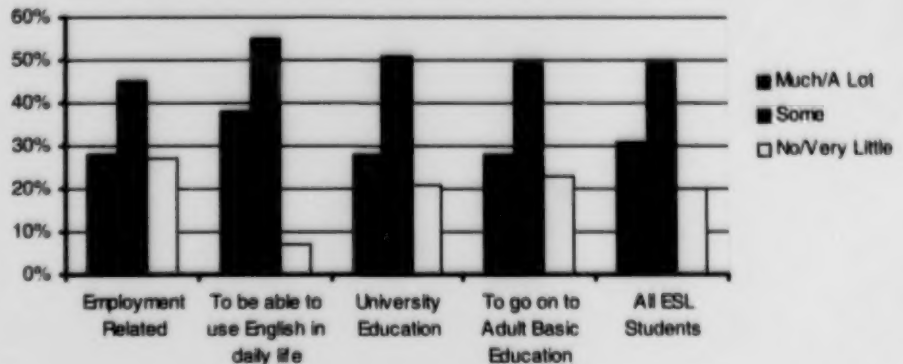
Of students who continued to take ESL training a year later, 68 percent changed their main goals from Fall '97. This may be a reflection of the changes ESL students go through as they adjust to life in Canada.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

HOW DO STUDENTS RATE THEIR PROGRESS TOWARDS THEIR GOALS?

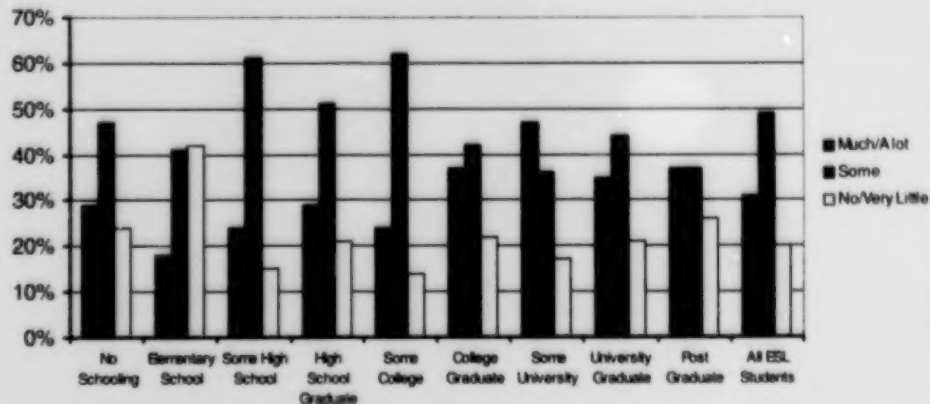
Overall, more than 80 percent of students felt they had made "some" to "much" progress towards meeting their goals.

Figure 10
Fall '98 / Progress Made by Reason for Studying ESL



The percentage of students who felt they made "no/very little" progress was lowest for literacy level students (13%), and increased with program level. There was no noticeable difference in students' assessments of their goals based on the type of program they studied.

Figure 11
Fall '98 / Progress Made by Highest Level of Education



Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

There was no noticeable difference between younger and older student's appraisals of the progress they had made. However, female students' were slightly less positive in their evaluation of the progress they made compared to male students.

DOES ESL TRAINING HELP STUDENTS REACH THEIR GOALS?

Students who felt they made progress towards their goals said their ESL training helped them.

Eighty percent of students who felt they had made progress toward their goals said their ESL training helped them. Of the remaining 20 percent of students who felt that they had not made any progress the most common reason was the need for more practice speaking English.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

(QUALITATIVE) WHAT BARRIERS DO ESL STUDENTS ENCOUNTER IN ACHIEVING THEIR GOALS?

Of all the frustrations and barriers in ESL students' lives, finding employment was the most disappointing, and carried serious consequences for themselves and their families. Finding a job had been or was still a problem for many of them. People who had been well paid professionals before coming to Canada were faced with the unattractive prospect of taking any job that was offered to them - if they were fortunate enough to be offered any job. When invited for an interview but not offered the job, they said, "a lack of Canadian experience", was the reason most frequently mentioned by employers. When asked if they felt discriminated against, they replied in the affirmative, although nothing directly discriminatory was ever said to them.

Sometimes we do get that impression. People judge the whole person by their level of English. The ESL people are turned away. Maybe that is why you see the same people taking ESL term after term.

Employers don't give ESL a lot of credit for experience and other skills they bring.

At first I was upset because I don't have job. It took one and half year to get job.

All this affects your feeling, your self-confidence. That is why most newcomer here have problems with their family... You are so depressed, you are angry, you are sad. You don't know why, but you are... Most immigrants here who have English problem, they have a problem with their family, they got depression...

Market demand for people under 30 is quite different than for older people.

A lot in their lives depends on learning English well: to get a job, completing the ESL program to qualify for academic courses, or getting enough ESL courses behind them to enrol in job training programs. The extent to which **time matters** in their lives would be almost impossible for a Canadian-born person to fully comprehend. The pressure of time was felt most by those who want to work, and some of them were very frustrated with, even resentful of, the power that individual teachers, rules, and college practices have over the time it takes them to reach their goals. *Teachers vary, and they decide how long you have to stay at a particular level. Teacher may not like you. If you don't finish the ESL program, usually people (employers) deny your English ability. They say you are not good enough... They ask for proof of English proficiency, so complete the ESL program for proof.*

Many of the students wanted to speed up their ESL studies or to be allowed to take a short-cut. They questioned whether all of the requirements were really necessary, given their line of work. One student said she was accepted into a job-training program, even though the program requirement is grade 12 and her assessment said grade 10. She said she didn't know why the requirement was overlooked in her case.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Problems in having their credentials and work experience recognized has already been discussed, and many of the students were either unemployed or were employed at lower skill levels than before immigrating to Canada (e.g., telemarketing, food preparation at McDonalds, managing a very small retail outlet, janitorial work, delivering papers). First careers had been abandoned, and people were re-training in different fields. A few of the younger students had begun or were about to begin taking university level courses, and some young to middle-aged students were enrolled in technical, trades and other job-training programs (electrician, drafting, computer programs, office work). Others were still trying to decide what they wanted to do after ESL.

I applied for jobs, but no one ever called or said something. I'm a stranger here, no wants to hire me. Maybe because they are scared I am not speaking English enough to understand people. I want to be helpful. I don't know, could the schools give some recommendation or something? I'm not looking for a permanent job, but for something to socialize, to be with other people. It is hard for me sitting at home alone. I just want to finish the grade 12, and... I will go and talk to the counselor, to help me decide about what I should do. I was thinking of a travel agent, but I still have doubts.

Decision points and circumstances in their college experiences that had cost them time, and often money, were:

- placement in a lower level of ESL than they felt was appropriate following their assessment test;
- failing an ESL course;
- not being able to register for their next course because all the seats were taken;
- not being able to register for the next course because it wasn't offered at a time of day they could attend;
- not being allowed to skip some of the English requirements to enrol in other programs; and
- in general, the length of time it takes to finish ESL or learn English.

Inability to register in the next ESL course, because there were no places left had been a problem at least once for many of the students in the groups. The problem was said to be chronic and severe at one institution, it sometimes happened at others, and rarely happened at a couple of institutions. The lack of seats in upper level courses were especially problematic at several institutions, and carried significant consequences for students who had progressed to that point and then "hit a brick wall".

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

A couple of students were taking assessment tests at other institutions, because they believed their chances would be better for getting a seat in a grade 12 equivalent ESL course. Others had already transferred to other institutions to improve their chances of either beginning an ESL program or continuing their studies without interruption.

ESL students can't make a plan. They never know if they are going to get the next course they need.

Waiting is Canadian culture.

Extraordinary efforts were said to be required in order to get a seat in the ESL program at one of the colleges if you were a new or transfer student.

You must come here early in the morning. Some people say that they came in the morning 3 am, and they were waiting here for six hours and didn't get registration forms or anything.

Students from this college have preference, they will be accepted first, then if there is places the other students... it is a policy... If a student stops and wants to re-start, then do like you are a beginner in this school.

Lots of people wants to come to this college, more people than the place available.

They wrote my name on the waiting list, and they called me after six or seven months...

I had to wait for one course and I waited in the long line, but I didn't get a seat. But the lady took our names and phoned me a few days later and said that another class opened so I was lucky.

Everybody know at ____ they have a long waiting list, so almost everybody waits six months.

Many of my friends came to Vancouver and left ____, because they had to wait one year for ESL. They went to Quebec and Ontario. They don't have to wait for ESL course in Ontario.

A participant said that if a student can not get the course they want and skips a term at one of the colleges, they have to pay \$20 to get in again and have to register after the local students register. The classes will be full, and they go on the waiting list.

Students at several colleges where waiting lists were normal procedure said the reason for their inability at times to get the courses they wanted was because international students are allowed to register before the domestic students.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

They said that some courses are full or nearly full when registration begins for them. Several complained about their perceived policy of allowing international students to register first and were told that their college would not be able to offer that course or as many courses without the money from the fees paid by international students. Moreover some students perceive that wait lists are not carried over to the next term, so domestic students face the same odds for a seat in the same course next term.

The reason immigrants are on wait lists is because of the international students. They pay \$_____.

They (international students) pay more money than us, so they register first, and they use their money to run the course.

The first day is for internationals, and the second day is for landed immigrant people. The fee is three times that for locals, so the priority is with them and often they fill the class.

I was the first person in the line after the international students, and I got on the waiting list.

Only five people can get in the class, and most of the space is for international students because they pay more... That is why I quit (ESL) and looking for a job. Because I have to wait four months. Nothing to do with the marks you get. Waiting list had 31 names, so no chance.

International students get the first opportunity to register... because they pay more money... Longer term students get a priority for registration (as compared with a student just entering the college), but they still don't always get the courses they want.

I think the budget is a real problem...

Why doesn't the government spend money for education?

Running out of money and running out of time presented some students with major barriers that led to their discontinuing or interrupting their ESL studies. A student who was not aware of the financial aid office at her college, said she could not afford to take ESL courses, because she had been unemployed for four years. Another student had a similar problem, saying he would have to pay for courses himself after upper advanced level.

So if I want to get grade 12 English to enrol as a full-time student in a college, I must find a way to do that. It is very hard. I tried to talk to counselors but they are very strict. I asked for a program this summer to get classes for grade 12 to be able to enrol as a full-time student at _____ from this September. So they didn't allow me to take these courses, so I must wait one year more to get all the prerequisites to enrol as full-time student.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

In nearly every group there was at least one student who had to stop taking ESL because of conflicts between work and the time the class was held. It appeared that evening courses were offered at the institutions these students attended but only to a certain level or certain courses were not offered every term. The unavailability of a particular course in the evening meant that some people could not continue their English studies. Several said they requested evening or weekend classes when they were interviewed for the ESL Outcomes telephone survey and at the office of their institution. They believed there is a sizeable untapped market for ESL classes offered in the evenings or weekends.

One student had arranged with his employer to leave work to attend ESL class, but said it was really difficult to get his employer to agree. It has affected his income to leave work, and he will have to carry on with this arrangement (if his employer is willing) to attend his last ESL course two days a week next term. When he asked if there were any classes at night, college staff told him night classes were being considered. This institution was said to have offered night classes for one semester but stopped them the next semester because *they said the budget wasn't enough*. When the subject of evening and weekend classes were raised in the groups, the students observed that there are empty classrooms in the colleges after regular hours. One employed participant said her college offers the ESL course equivalent to grade 12 in the evenings and early mornings, and she would take it in the evenings next term.

Whenever the topic of evening or weekend classes was raised, the students were asked if they knew other students who had stopped taking ESL, because they had conflicts between work and class times. They believe there are enough students in this situation to fill evening courses. Students with children pointed out that evening classes were the most convenient for them too, because their husbands were home and could look after the children, whereas, during day hours their husbands were at work and they had to pay for child-care to attend class.

A student from the Indo-Canadian community said many people are coming to Canada from India because of marriages and need to learn English. The problem is that they have to go to work right away, because they don't have enough money to support themselves for even a short period of time after they arrive in this country. The only way that most of these newcomers can take ESL classes is in the evening. This student also said that employers want their new hires to know some English or to learn it right away. He felt that evening courses, if offered, would be fully enrolled.

The issue of where courses are offered at institutions with multiple campuses was raised in several groups. Students said they started ESL at a campus near their home but would have to travel to a different campus at some point in their studies, because the next course would only be offered at another campus.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Long commutes and inadequate public transit were problems for them. Changing campuses was so inconvenient for a couple of them that they stopped their English studies. One student had moved to be near the campus that offered ESL.

Several questioned why ESL wasn't offered at all campuses, because the buildings and equipment are already in place. *What is the purpose of campuses in different communities? To make the college closer to people, and if you have the campus you have to use it. The building and equipment are there now. What is the point to have three or four buildings in three or four different towns, and you keep all the (ESL) classes here...* The few who had asked similar questions of college staff said they were told there were not enough people in these other communities to fill a class. The students disagreed with this view but felt that some effort would have to be made to inform people if ESL was offered for the first time at a particular community campus.

Some of the students were not well informed about their options, especially those wanting to take a job training program. An important area of misinformation and lack of information was whether they could take a certain job training program if they *hadn't finished ESL*. They sometimes assumed they had to finish ESL before being eligible to take any other program and were amazed to hear others in their group say they had enrolled in other programs or courses before finishing their ESL studies. Examples of courses they mentioned an interest in taking but did not know if they were eligible: automotive mechanics and computers.

The lack of standardization in ESL programs offered at different institutions had presented a significant barrier to some students in the groups and to their friends. They said if one starts ESL courses at a college then one has to continue to go there. *Academic courses need prerequisite of ____ level of ESL (like grade 12 English), but it is accepted only by ____ , not the other colleges... After ____ level at ____ you can take other courses at ____ , but other colleges, it doesn't mean they accept (the course). Every college has a particular policy. The other colleges will ask you to get another assessment.* One student had inquired at four colleges and two universities, and had been told by each he would be reassessed and the ESL grade 12 course successfully completed at another college would not automatically be accepted.

When asked why they were reluctant to be reassessed, they replied that while there are standardized tests like TOEFL, the assessments are college-specific tests. Since there are different styles of teaching and different exams and tests in the different colleges, they were worried they would fail another institution's assessment. Also, they said there is a fee for these tests. Rather than be reassessed and perhaps face the time and expense of covering ground they feel and their college says they have successfully mastered, some students were continuing on in other programs at the college where they took ESL, even when they would prefer to go elsewhere. A student who moved and now lives very close to a different college travels a great distance to get to ESL classes at the institution where she started ESL. A student dropped out of ESL for a four-month period, because her husband was offered a short term contract in another community. A friend of one of the participants stopped taking ESL with great reluctance when she moved to another community.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

That's the problem. Each city they have different courses... There in Richmond and Vancouver they mix their reading and writing together... I didn't do it, that's the problem, they don't have same equivalent courses... even in the same province. It makes no sense. It needs to be flexible for people in our situation, because we need to move about...

They said they were surprised to learn about the lack of standardization of ESL programs and became aware of the potential problems for themselves at some point after they were enrolled. *I thought it is a standard level for all colleges, that they would accept all the English course...* They asked that the post-secondary system solve this problem for ESL students. *Everybody try to get a standard level, standard that should be allowed him or her to anywhere, to any education institution.*

A few students complained about the mechanics of the registration system, saying it was time consuming and frustrating, because the lines are busy and the student is forced to wait as long as it takes. Some believe that courses fill in the first hour of registration day. One person said it takes him two hours to register, because he gets a busy signal. He suggested that more lines be open at registration time. *You have two steps. First, you have to get a registration number. I always forgot the first step.*

Much frustration was vented in the groups about the length of time it takes to get through the entire ESL program to qualify for further studies or to gain the language proficiency they desired. Having to go on waitlists and sit out a term compounded this problem. Several students described how they had abandoned the full ESL route and were going into programs where English 12 was not required, and their proficiency was sufficient to keep up with the class. Some of them were very motivated students and said they had worked a lot on their English outside of class and felt confident they were ready to take other programs.

In summary, the main reasons why students stop taking ESL are identical to the major barriers faced by this group of students in general. These are:

- lack of standardization of ESL programs across the system,
- inability to transfer ESL credit from one institution to another,
- limited offering of evening courses,
- having to go on wait lists to begin or continue ESL,
- demands on time and energy of combining work and family responsibilities with attending class and completing homework assignments,
- discouragement with one's progress in learning English, and
- discouragement with the length of time it takes to complete ESL studies or be eligible for further academic studies or job training programs.

DISCUSSION

Barriers to Goal Achievement

In the qualitative section on barriers to achieving work and education goals, students expressed a number of concerns that merit further discussion. They are discouraged by wait lists, inflexible class schedules, transfer problems, as well as their lack of English prerequisites for training programs and the conflicting demands of home, work and school. Many of these issues are already being addressed. Some institutions in the system have found solutions that may be useful to others. Good communication across the system will allow for the sharing of strategies.

The area of transfer is one where much attention is currently being focussed. It is now possible to articulate courses between institutions and that is being done through the provincial ESL Articulation Steering Committee. Some programs are responding to these concerns by providing information sessions for potential students. Other responses include setting up drop-in self paced learning centre programs for those with heavy outside responsibilities and little money, and offering combined skills/ESL job training programs which permit students to begin their studies with a lower English level.

Of course, some expectations may also be impossible to meet. It is not possible to fast track the learning of a new language and culture. Students expectations of themselves and their classes may, in some cases, be too high. In other cases, institutions may have had to make difficult choices when allocating resources. If there is more demand for daytime programming than for evening, the funding will probably have been spent on day classes.

This document can be an excellent starting point for discussions in the field that would allow the sharing of ideas to take place. The ESL Articulation list serve would be an obvious way of beginning such discussions.

HOW DO STUDENTS
RATE THEIR IN-CLASS
EXPERIENCES?

4. ESL Student Evaluation of Campus Experiences and Quality of Training

Students' generally evaluate their in-class experiences positively.

Reflecting on their ESL training up to the time of the telephone survey in Fall '98, students were asked to evaluate their ESL experiences.

- 88 percent felt "always/most of the time" comfortable, welcome and secure in their ESL classes.
- 79 percent found that their instructors "always/most of the time" explained things clearly to them.
- 76 percent of students "always/most of the time" had a good understanding of how they were being graded and evaluated.
- 72 percent of students "always/most of the time" participated actively in class and over two-thirds (69%) "always/most of the time" felt they were making progress.
- Only 6 percent found the classes to be too easy for them and 6 percent found the classes to be too difficult "always/most of the time".
- 69 percent were comfortable "always/most of the time" with the number of tests they were required to complete.
- 75 percent "always/most of the time" found the course materials to be useful.
- 39 percent felt that there was "not enough" time spent in-class with computers.

Table 9
Student Ratings of In-Class Experiences

	Student Experiences were Satisfying		
	"Always/most of the time"	"Sometimes"	"Not very often /never"
Felt comfortable and secure?	88%	10%	2%
Felt instructors explained things clearly?	79%	18%	3%
Understood evaluation and grading	76%	14%	10%
Found materials useful?	75%	19%	5%
Participated in class?	72%	23%	5%
Felt comfortable with number of tests?	69%	21%	10%
Felt they were making progress?	69%	28%	3%
Found classes too difficult?	6%	39%	55%
Found classes too easy?	6%	33%	60%

HOW DO ESL
STUDENTS FEEL ABOUT
THE AMOUNT OF TIME
SPENT DEVELOPING
LANGUAGE SKILLS IN
CLASS?

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Students felt their ESL studies needed to emphasize speaking skills more.

ESL students generally agreed that the amount of time spent in class on writing, reading, and listening was "about right".

Table 10
Evaluation of Time Spent Improving Skills

Amount of time spent was:			
	"Too much"	"About right"	"Not enough"
Writing	6%	69%	26%
Reading	6%	72%	22%
Speaking	3%	54%	43%
Listening	3%	69%	28%

Speaking was identified as the skill area where more time was required; 43 percent of all students said "not enough" time was spent on developing this skill. Students in *Work: Vocational ESL* programs were especially likely to want additional time spent developing speaking skills.

Table 11
Evaluation of Time Spent Improving Speaking Skills by Program Level

Amount of time spent was			
	"Too much"	"About right"	"Not enough"
Access	2%	56%	42%
Academic	4%	53%	43%
English for Work	4%	49%	49%
All ESL Students	3%	54%	43%

HOW HELPFUL DO
STUDENTS FIND THEIR
ESL TRAINING?

Over 90 percent of ESL students feel their training helped them "some" or "a lot" with their skills.

When it came to the four English language skills – reading, writing, speaking, listening – over 90 percent of students felt their ESL studies had helped them "some" or "a lot." Although students were overwhelmingly positive about the amount each skill area had helped them, speaking again emerged as a skill area where more work was needed.

Table 12
Evaluation of Extent ESL Helped Improve Skills

	ESL Studies Helped...		
	"Helped A Lot"	"Helped Some"	"Did Not Help"
Writing	57%	36%	7%
Reading	54%	40%	6%
Speaking	48%	43%	9%
Listening	53%	41%	6%

ESL training has an impact on its students that extends far beyond improving English language skills.

Sixty-two percent of students felt that their ESL studies helped them "some" or "a lot" to meet other Canadians. If they were working in Fall '98, 90 percent felt that their ESL studies had helped them "some" or "a lot" with English in their jobs. If they were taking non-ESL post secondary courses (Adult Basic Education, Job Training, University Level), **97 percent felt that their ESL studies had helped them "some" or "a lot" with English in their studies.**

Of students who felt their English usage and/or understanding had improved from Fall '97 to Fall '98, **98 percent felt that their ESL studies had helped them "some" or "a lot".**

HOW SATISFIED ARE
STUDENTS WITH THEIR
ESL TRAINING?

Overall, students are satisfied with their ESL experience.

85 percent of students reported they were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with the ESL training they received.

Table 13
Overall Satisfaction by Program Type

	Overall Satisfaction	
	"Very" or "Somewhat" Satisfied	"Very" or "Somewhat" Dissatisfied
Access	87%	4%
Academic	84%	5%
Work-Related	82%	6%
All Programs	85%	5%

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Although they represent a very low number of students, 11 percent of students under 20 were "somewhat" or "very" dissatisfied, compared with the overall figure of 5 percent.

Nearly every ESL student would recommend their ESL program to someone else.

When asked if they would recommend their ESL program to someone they knew, a remarkable 97 percent said they would.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

(QUALITATIVE) WHAT ARE ESL STUDENTS EXPECTATIONS FOR THEIR CLASSES?

The students complimented their teachers and colleges and were grateful for the opportunity to take ESL classes. The content of the discussions on their expectations centered on comparing classes where they felt they had made rapid progress with classes where their progress had been slow. Having had several courses and different teachers, they could compare the classroom procedures, homework assignments, teaching skills and styles, and the personal characteristics of their various teachers. Many of them held strong opinions about what worked for them and what did not. On some of these matters there appeared to be general agreement, but opinion differed on others.

It is useful, the ESL.

I like it because it is very comfortable.

This college prepares ESL students for college.

I think ESL is really good. It got me where I am today.

I have been learning English only two years, and I feel I am good - studying only two years new language. It is great, because it is a good place to learn. ...All the teachers I met here, they treat me very nicely. I have a permanent place in my heart for them...

Yes, it is a good place for learning more.

Learning English was not so hard. Sometimes I don't understand, but if they repeat it I understand, better if they speak slow.

I was so satisfied. I loved _____. It was so helpful for me... _____ gave me confidence, very much... My husband took care of our son, and I tried to use all my minutes... I went to class, came home and studied till late at night. Also my teacher was perfect. She helped me a lot.

There was general agreement among participants that all students in a class have a better chance of making good progress if the students are at the same level. The mixing of student levels appeared to occur more frequently in beginner and intermediate classes than in advanced classes, although it was said to happen at higher levels too. One student said that every course he was enrolled in had two or three levels of proficiency represented. Students who were at a lower level than some of their classmates expressed most of the frustration with mixed levels. *...In the high level can get it very fast, but I am at a low level and I can't get it fast and that is the biggest problem.* If the student is the same level it is better. The difficulty that a mixture of levels posed for teachers was also mentioned. The participants believed that limited finances was the reason why students at varying levels of learning English are put in the same class. *Instead of six class, they put together and they make three class. Six level and they make three class.*

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

It should be remembered that many of the participants in the focus groups came to Canada with impressive personal histories of having been successful students. Some were members of a highly educated elite in their own countries and had never experienced failure in school. One student told a story of the emotionally devastating and long term consequences for her when she was placed in a course that was beyond her level and failed. *I have a very bad memory, bad feeling from _____. ...I had a very struggling time... I talked to my teacher, I talked to head of my department, I talked to somebody else... I found out they registered my name in ____ (a higher level course), because they didn't have enough students for ____ (a lower level course). I never had failure in my whole studies. I studied for 16 years in my country and didn't have failure. That hurt me emotionally very very badly... This failure remains on me for more than one year. Nobody could help me. My failure came from bad policy. It was a waste of money, my time and my feelings.* This particular student has continued her ESL studies at a different college, where she said she was placed in the appropriate level and has earned good marks.

Although a minority in these focus groups, a couple of participants in similar situations had managed to pass their courses and felt they had benefited from being placed in a more advanced class than appropriate for their skills at the time. *One who complained about the amount of time it takes to get through ESL said, It was a shock. It was a very hard time. ...For me, better to have a hard time than waste time.* The other student said he found it motivating to compete with the other students, and the competition improved his performance. None of the participants in these groups said they had dropped classes that were too difficult for them, but some said they knew of students who had.

Limited budgets were also blamed for large class sizes. ESL students would like smaller classes and most who offered an opinion on this topic said their classes in public institutions were about twice the ideal size of 10 to 12 people. Advanced level classes were said to be smaller than lower level classes at some institutions. Many advantages of smaller classes were noted. Teachers can become better acquainted with their students and their needs. Teachers have more time to spend one-on-one with individual students, and students have more opportunities to have their questions answered and attention paid to their particular weaknesses. Small classes permit more speaking time for each student, so that their pronunciation and grammar can be corrected. Shy students feel more comfortable and are not as reluctant to speak or write on the board in smaller groups. Smaller classes are easier for teachers to supervise and ensure that students are only speaking English in class. Perhaps also related to the issue of too many students in ESL classes was the request voiced in several focus groups that teachers correct all the written work of each student. The length of time it takes to learn English was a concern to most of the students in the groups, and small classes were believed to be conducive to efficient learning. *With 12 people I think it is a decent number in classroom with one teacher.*

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Overcrowding and having to wait for help at computer labs and learning centres was said to be a problem at some colleges but not at others. Limited open hours were also mentioned as a barrier for working people. Students said they would use these facilities on the weekends or in the evenings if they were open. Without exception, they said that good help was available in the centres and labs. *In computer lab, we always have two or three people with us, the instructor, the lady responsible for the computer lab and a volunteer student from the college. All there to answer questions. They are really doing a great job.*

In several of the groups, a student mentioned having had an ESL teacher who spoke English with an accent. In the groups where this topic was raised, there was general agreement that accented English can present added difficulties to students who are trying to learn correct pronunciation and acquire listening skills. Some had strong feelings on this issue, because they said they had been taught improper pronunciation during their English studies before coming to Canada. Several commented that even British accents were difficult for them to understand. They believe that hearing words "pronounced correctly" is critical for fast learning in the beginning of their studies. Accents were not an issue for everyone, and some said they had no difficulty understanding any of their teachers, even those with accents. Teachers who spoke English with an accent were said to be least problematic in writing courses or advanced levels of ESL.

LINC was supposed to be a class where you introduce the English language very nicely, very smoothly, very good pronunciation... I couldn't understand what the teacher was saying.

I always have good teachers, but I agree that for any language that this language is taught by native speakers. For any other field, it doesn't matter, matters only how much knowledge person has.

On a related issue, some said that it was difficult for students to help each other and complained about the common classroom practice of breaking students into small groups or pairs. They said students couldn't understand each other much of the time, given the fact that none of them pronounced English well, and that often they had different first languages, so their accents varied. In writing classes, working in small groups or pairs was sometimes not beneficial, because they had made the same mistakes in their writing assignments. Changing partners and mixing the composition of small groups was said to be helpful in counteracting these difficulties. One student who was convinced that he could only learn correct pronunciation from the instructor, *because no one else had the right accent either*, suggested that native speaker students at the college come to ESL classes as volunteers or paid assistants. *I think there should be involvement with English language people in the class. It doesn't work well with only one teacher and 20 who want to learn to speak.*

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

For two hours you are sitting discussing each other, that is Chinese, that is Korean, different accents. We can't talk together. We learn wrong. Everybody has the same problem. No one can talk together right. Four tables, the teacher can only be at one table at a time. Teacher sit there and listen, but the class is 20 people. Some speak their first language. Teacher provide questions to the class and say, go find the answers from the book, and not teaching.

A student in one of the groups said she believes it is the policy of the college that after a certain level, the students do as much as possible by themselves. *It is a way of teaching, not just in your class but in every class after a certain level - it is a policy. The teacher is there if you have questions, she provide you with resources.*

The common denominator in many of the complaints expressed about certain class activities appeared to be a common expectation that teachers would use class time for teaching. In essence, ESL students come to class to learn directly from the teacher and have their weaknesses addressed. Many students do not want to read to themselves or do/correct homework during class. *We can read at home, but we came to class to learn the correct pronunciation.* Teachers were said to vary in how well they prepared students for tests, but students expect all teachers to prepare them for both in-class tests and standardized English tests. In several groups, participants mentioned how stressful tests are for ESL students, because a lot in their lives hinges on the results.

One of the groups described an unproductive way of structuring class time that they referred to as *the old fashioned teaching approach*. *Everybody reads from a thick book in class, you read one paragraph and teacher gives some explanation, read some more, do the exercises at home and write an essay at home, bring it to the teacher, he marks it and gives it back to us. The same thing tomorrow - there is no teaching technique in this class, no teaching skills, no involvement with the teachers, just sit in class and do it.* Other groups, however, felt that similar class structures were appropriate and an effective use of class time.

Whether or not it was worthwhile spending a lot of time building vocabulary in class was a topic that was raised in several groups and on which there was disagreement. Some students described how they had continued to enlarge their working vocabularies on their own through reading and conversation. Their opinion was that "the larger the vocabulary, the better". One of these students said she was proud when native speakers complimented her on her big vocabulary.

Others felt that many of the words they had learned in ESL classes were not in common use by native speakers. *I learn big vocabulary in ESL, but never use many of the words in conversation.*

If I want to talk to the principal of children's school, I have a problem. One in particular had an interesting assessment of his listening skills. He said he understands the words, because he has a big vocabulary, but unlike the children around him, he can't understand the meaning when all the words are strung together in a sentence. In summary, they want to learn correct English, but they also want to be able to understand native speakers when they speak to each other.

In several of the groups, a student said their teacher had asked the class what they wanted to know, and this was how slang and swear words became a side lesson in two of these classes. A student who had always been taught the *formal style of English* in her courses said *bad words* had presented difficulties for her in parenting her children. *I got very troubled when they speak a bad word, and I don't know that word. I have to correct them, but I don't know if that's bad word.* Regardless of whether they preferred to learn formal or informal English, the need for more speaking time in class was voiced in many of the groups. *In my experience, I don't think the class gave me lots of chance to speaking. In the class, I can understand what teacher said, but if I go somewhere in real society, I find their speaking is pretty fast and lots of words connect together, so you cannot figure out what they talking.* Another person in this group said being able to understand native speakers also depends on whether or not the listener has experience with that subject.

The participants in these groups wanted only English spoken in their ESL classes. They liked the rule, *leave your native language behind the door.* Some said their teachers did not allow first languages to be spoken in class, but other teachers were less strict on this point. They said a negative effect of having students with the same first language in a class was that these students had a tendency to speak to each other in their first language.

A few of the students were puzzled by the absence of Canadian learning resources in their ESL reading and writing courses. These students said most of the books they used in class were written in the United States, and the stories were set in that country. They said they wanted to learn about Canadian cities, provinces, culture, laws, Canadian issues and problems while they were studying English. *Why don't they stick with Canadian books?* One person brought a book to one of the focus groups called, *Readers Choice*, which had been used in a writing course. This book was written by Canadians, and was offered as an example of the type of book students expected to use in ESL classes. Some of the articles were written by ESL students, and another participant in this group said these articles were about *how they overcome their language barriers and how they get the courage - very important for us. When we have barriers, we read this and know we are just like them. Inspirational.*

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

A student in a couple of the groups (always an older student) expressed the opinion that ESL classes should be segregated by age. The different goals of younger and older students, the seriousness with which they approached English studies, and the slower learning pace of older students because of their age or other demands on their time were all cited as reasons. *Older student hates to waste time, wants the teacher to teach. Younger students like the teacher to joke with them...* Many older students mentioned studying late into the night, four hours a day or longer, and still had trouble completing their assignment. One of the parents in the groups described an additional pressure he felt in being a parent enrolled in ESL. *Adults think they have to do well, have to be a good role model for their children.* A range of ages was also felt to be more difficult for the teacher to deal with. *Hard for the teacher. Teachers have to teach both the young and mature students.* Grouping by age did not appear to be a popular idea with the majority, however. *...The goals may be different, but it is better if the ages are mixed.* It is more difficult for the teacher, but better for the students. It is a privilege of ESL classes. A student in a different group said, *Young students need mature students to learn from them, because they are more motivated than the young students...* *Mature students want to learn the language, younger one want to finish grade 12. Younger students make fun, lots of energy, not so serious.*

The fact that credit is not given for passing ESL courses, or that credit cannot be transferred for further academic studies was mentioned several times. *I am just ESL student, so I don't have the credit to go to SFU.* For at least one student, this meant that grades don't matter as much to ESL students as to other students. Also, one group said that no diploma or certificate is given to ESL students; there is nothing that symbolizes their accomplishment. A student remarked, *It make me feel different* (from other college students).

Expectations of ESL

Students recognized that teaching ESL is a difficult job. They praised many of their teachers for their combination of teaching skills, social skills, an ability to take the role of their students and know when the class or even a particular student has not grasped an explanation, and for having a genuine interest in teaching English to them. They were asked to describe the characteristics of a good teacher, and they were told to think of one very good teacher they had, or about the qualities they liked or found effective in several teachers. Some participants appeared to find this part of their discussion especially interesting, and they had much to say.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Good teachers are patient. "Patient" was the most frequently mentioned attribute of a good ESL teacher, and perhaps this is because patience accounts for many of the characteristics and behaviours valued most by students. If thought of as a meta-attribute, the central role that patience plays becomes obvious in other characteristics of good teachers: *speaks slowly, explains things well, nice, understanding, listens to us, etc.*

When asked why patience is important, a student replied, *I guess that gives the students less pressure. They can express what they want to say. Sometimes their communication ability is not very good, so they might need people to listen with more patience so they understand them more. What they are trying to say might not be what they are saying. Teacher needs to understand what they are trying to say.*

The lack of patience on the part of a teacher for a job training course resulted in these statements. *ESL student understanding was weaker than the other students, and the teacher didn't have enough patience. He said, (a put down), and it really hurt our feelings. After that, I don't want to ask my questions. I know it is difficult for him. He expected us to keep up.*

Good teachers are friendly with students. Being "friendly with students" had almost as many facets to it as "patience". The main idea was to treat students like adults. For some, this meant understanding the demands on adult students and sometimes they will be late for a class, miss a class, or not get their homework done. If students are punished for these things, they will lose confidence. If this behaviour repeats itself, then the teacher should investigate. For others, it was showing concern for students who may have a problem. This seemed to mean informing them of where help was available (e.g., financial aid, personal counselling at the college), instead of getting personally involved in their lives. Still others enjoyed interacting with their teachers as equals, sharing a joke, and being acknowledged by name when they met in the hall (even months later).

Teachers in Canada were sometimes compared with teachers in other countries who were said to be far more formal, unfriendly and intimidating. *I really noticed that ESL teachers here... It's different than our country's, you know. They are friendly, and you are not student here, you are just a friend and they're helping you. That has really touched me. Another student said, Teachers in my country are very harsh... Students don't like to talk to the teachers...*

Although many of them admired teachers who expected students to work hard, there were some negative comments about teachers who were strict or formal. *We come here to study, and we have many problem behind to try to come, so when we come to class and we have to sit like this, formal, it's hard. Another student remarked, One teacher didn't like it when other students came to class late and made a bad day for them. Another teacher just said hello in a happy way if a student was late. This was better for everybody. We are adults, we have many problems.*

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

A story about early intervention was told by a student and illustrates a teacher's sensitivity to early signs of trouble and way of dealing with the situation that was appreciated by and comfortable for the student. A student with a young baby said she didn't get her homework done a couple of times because her baby was sick. After this had happened the second time, her teacher asked her to come to his office and then *talked to me like a friend...* He told her if she had a problem, if something was bothering her, she could go to the counselor and talk about it. She said she was grateful to know there was someone she could talk to, and the conversation would be kept confidential. *It was very nice of him to talk to me like that, because some people have situation at home, and they don't like to say it and they don't like to talk to teachers about it, even if they are friendly and nice...* While in her case, the situation was temporary, she pointed out that other students might be dealing with very serious problems and need someone to talk to, *some people might have abusive family or abusive husband.*

A few students regarded a particular teacher as a special friend, although this did not appear to be expected of teachers. Their relationship with their former teacher was very important to them. They felt that this person cared about them as an individual and was willing to help them unlock the code to the perplexing mysteries of Canadian life, even some time after they had shared a classroom.

Good teachers explain things well. Certainly, a universally recognized characteristic of any good teacher is to be able to provide explanations in a manner that students understand. Since comprehension problems are a given with ESL students, teachers must provide clear explanations and know when they have been understood and when further explaining is required.

I had many many teachers in high school and college, but she was very special because, first of all, when she taught something to us, she wanted to make sure we got it, and she didn't let us go until we got the information she wanted us to have.

She could transfer all information she wanted to us. She could. She explained very, very, very good, and we could get it.

Some teachers were good, some weren't. Some teachers want to make sure all students understand and feel comfortable. It is impossible to have all the students same level in the class... so in this situation, the high level students work faster, but the low level students may be completely lost, so the teacher should realize who is who and give opportunity for not (just) the best students improve themselves...

She asked what students wanted from the class, and helped to reach to that goal. At ____, the teacher didn't have any patience, she was just teacher for high level students. She would explain just once.

A good teacher explains well, and if you don't understand right away, she will ask what part don't you understand and she will demonstrate.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Good teachers are hard working and don't waste time in class. According to students, class time should be used for teaching, and this topic has been discussed in an earlier section of this report. A teacher who worked hard was described this way. *She helped students prepare for the quizzes, the quiz wasn't a surprise for you. The others don't provide the material the exam is going to cover. When you ask them they say, oh we are not the one who is making the quiz.* Like all students, opinion was divided on the issue of homework. While most did not dispute the necessity of homework for learning, some found it difficult to find time to complete assignments, especially for writing courses. It was interesting that teachers who gave lots of homework were often viewed as good teachers. *The writing teacher was good. She worked very hard in class, she gave more homework, gave tests, and students worked hard.*

Some students felt they would benefit from more one-on-one time with their teachers. The help they received from staff at computer labs, learning centres and from tutors were valued, but some wanted additional time with their teachers to work on their particular weaknesses.

Good teachers are flexible. Flexible teachers have to be observant enough to understand the strengths and weaknesses of individual students. They recognize when an approach isn't working with a particular class and try a different approach. They are aware of the needs of the class and can adjust the level to match that of the students. They identify and address the weaknesses of their students. In most of the groups, a participant mentioned how a teacher had asked the students what they wanted to learn or do in the class. How teachers dealt with the answers to that question was said to vary. *I don't have any information, but I had impression that most of them just ask us for our needs, and then they are going according to their program that they have...* Teachers who were flexible sometimes put aside the lesson plan for the day to focus on what was important to students. Sometimes this occurred after a student asked a question, and it became apparent that others in the class had an interest in the topic as well.

If teacher works hard in class then can adjust a little bit — more tenses, more spelling, more speaking in this class... very important...

One more skill a good teacher should have — to feel the needs of the class and to teach them what they need. Sometimes it is understandable that a program cannot be good for everybody, but it could be adjusted during the time. For example, at the beginning the teacher has no idea about the knowledge of all students, but after one or two weeks a good teacher can adjust program to students' needs. I had only one teacher, although I said all my teachers were very good, I had just one teacher that had very good sense to adjust program to students' needs, and I enjoyed this class very well, and I learned in this class more than in all others.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Good teachers provide variety in the classroom. They try to make the learning experience enjoyable for students and realize that not all students learn best from one approach or when the same routine is followed day after day. They show videos, bring interesting materials to class, and vary the content - *sometimes have the class practice conversation and other times study grammar*. In the lower levels they use pictures to help with vocabulary, and use body language and facial expressions to help convey meaning. Variety in the classroom was also said to be important, because ESL students are often tired when they come to class (from work, looking for a job, taking care of children, and from stress).

In some classes, teachers had arranged for student presentations to be video-taped, and this was felt to be very useful. *Video-tape was really helpful, could see and hear your own mistakes, past tense and plurals*. A student from a different college said, *I liked when they would tape record us and then we would listen to it and they would give us advice. So we know if we sound good or bad and are making the right sounds. It was funny in the beginning, but I like it*. A student in the same group said, *I went to a job finding place, and they did a video-tape of a mock interview and gave me the tape. I am still laughing about that*.

Good teachers were also said to be *inspirational*, meaning they have ways of helping their students generate ideas in writing classes. *Inspiration is very important. ... The students wrote down the topic on the blackboard so we know what we will learn today. Write down lots of words, so when we are writing we have lots of material to use. So you don't feel your mind is blocked, so you can write easily*.

Good teachers keep students relaxed, so they are prepared to learn.

Several groups discussed the detrimental effects of high stress levels on the ability to learn and perform well on tests. *Some teachers give students self-confidence, but some teachers make students nervous. When a student feels nervous they can't learn English*. Relaxed teachers may be one of the keys to keeping students relaxed. *Most of us are not that experienced to judge a teacher, but the way he explains things, how simple they make it, how loose he is, because if the teacher is tough or tight, it is not going to help*.

It was interesting that some very successful students who had gone on to take university credit courses in English mentioned their poor performance on their initial English diagnostic test. *Pathetic results. My grade was terrible*. While a couple of these students said they knew little English when they were assessed, a few others felt they had performed far below their ability because of stress. One of these students was placed in upper intermediate based on the assessment results. She got an A+ in the course, and then was allowed to skip several levels because *it was too easy*. She said her assessment *wasn't accurate, because when you come to a place that is new, everything is a shock, and it is stressful*.

A student said she had many teachers, and *the last one didn't give us stress for tests. When we have test we can't control this feeling, we have stress. The other teachers they make class when have test... they gave us stress. This teacher ... anytime she took test from us, I didn't have stress, and I was very relaxed.... We learn... We were friendly together until the class finished. I think the best class I had.... The students learned lots...*

Good teachers are guides to life in Canada. It was clear from each of the discussion groups that ESL students rely on their teachers to introduce them to Canadian culture. They are *in harmony with this culture* and teach about life in Canada. The students were very appreciative of teachers who discussed politics and social issues with them and provided them with background information on stories in the news. A few had arranged activities for their students outside of class time to meet and speak English. Teachers who have grown up in this culture were said to be more likely to recognize when natural opportunities presented themselves to teach about Canada. Students also praised the less formal style and participatory approach of Canadian-born teachers. *I don't wish to criticize any teachers, maybe by chance, but during when I studied, those teachers who were brought up in Canada, brought up in this system, they make the classes pleasant for the student.*

Good teachers speak English well. As already discussed in this report, some students felt it was important for ESL teachers to be native speakers. Regardless of whether or not they are native speakers, students think teachers should speak English well. *It is very important that teacher has a good accent, a clear voice, and speaks slowly. Good teachers should speak English well. Should choose teachers like this.*

There was a more subtle aspect to the issue of native English speakers, and that was their deeper understanding of the language and culture. They were said to be more likely to explain things that weren't in the textbook, because they are aware of something behind that — *grammar we can see in every book, something that is hidden. That is why I said that native speaking people probably have natural instinct to explain something that is not in any book... It's impossible to write everything in a book.*

Good teachers love teaching others English. This characteristic was explicitly mentioned in a few of the groups. Participants said they could tell if a teacher was really interested in teaching ESL, or if they were there to collect a pay cheque. Students thought that some teachers are not focussed on the best interests of students, because they were more concerned with institutional politics or concerns about career advancement. According to the students in one of the focus groups, there are a few things that good teachers do not do, ever. *They do not give hard tests or low marks just to show their colleagues or administrators that they have high teaching standards. They do not let political things determine their behaviour, such that they are not trying to be helpful to students.*

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

The most important part of teacher characteristic is to love teaching others English. ESL teachers are very special from other teachers, but some people just do their job for their payroll, but some of them are great... You can feel the teacher who teach, the feeling is very very different from the other one.

I think the most important thing for a teacher is to have emotion and passion for teaching English as a second language... After one or two weeks of class if students encounter old fashioned styles of teaching, teachers are just acting politically for themselves, they are busy out of class, the students lose their emotions (motivation).

The ESL teachers are the direct representatives of the college. Their behaviours may make people interested in that institution and maybe not. It's very important for the college...

Good teachers know how to make students feel comfortable, how to encourage them through facial expressions and eye contact, and how to let the student know their effort is appreciated. A good teacher acknowledges the extraordinary effort that is required in learning a second language. If a teacher is doing these things, after a time even shy students start to speak. When the whole group cooperates, it is fun to be there, and they are making good use of their time.

Mentioned once, was that ESL teachers should have a good background and education. Well educated teachers were said to have a broad thinking that is not limited; they have more to draw on when providing explanations.

DISCUSSION

Meeting ESL Students' Expectations

The students who participated in the qualitative section of this chapter have many positive things to say about their ESL programs and, particularly, about their ESL instructors. They also raise several interesting points for discussion.

Several of the issues raised are of concern to the ESL field as well. Classes with large enrollments, or where students are at differing levels of English expertise, do not provide optimum learning conditions. However, these compromises may be the best that we can provide in certain circumstances. Classes can often be kept small only by turning away students. This simply makes the wait list situation worse. Institutions try to balance the students' need for small classes with the students' need for quick admission. Is it better to keep more students waiting or to accept two or three more individuals into each English section? The multi-level class may be addressing the opposite problem. There are likely not enough students in some small communities or specific neighbourhoods to allow a second class to be opened. Learning in a multi-level class may not be ideal, although there are teaching techniques which can improve it, but surely it is better than having no class at all.

Some of the other issues mentioned by the students are perhaps more easily addressed. Classrooms can institute an English-only policy. Students themselves can be involved in discussions on the need for this, in creating posters advertising the policy and in devising strategies for correcting infractions. Canadian textbooks and materials for adult ESL learners are becoming increasingly available, enabling institutions to gradually change over their resource collections.

Some of the issues concerning the ESL classroom are particularly interesting. ESL students come from many differing systems of education. However, in general, they are used to a more traditional, teacher-centred approach. The ESL field favours a student-centred, interactive facilitation of learning. A strategy which is often successful is to gradually wean the students from their accustomed style and to be extremely clear about the objectives of the classroom activities. Once students realize that they are indeed learning by following our methods, they will usually accept them. An eclectic style which involves a number of different approaches is often the most effective when dealing with a multi-cultural group.

5. English Language Skill Development

ESL programs focus on developing language skills that help students gain confidence using English in every day situations. The amount of time students speak English in a typical day is one way to measure the success of ESL training.

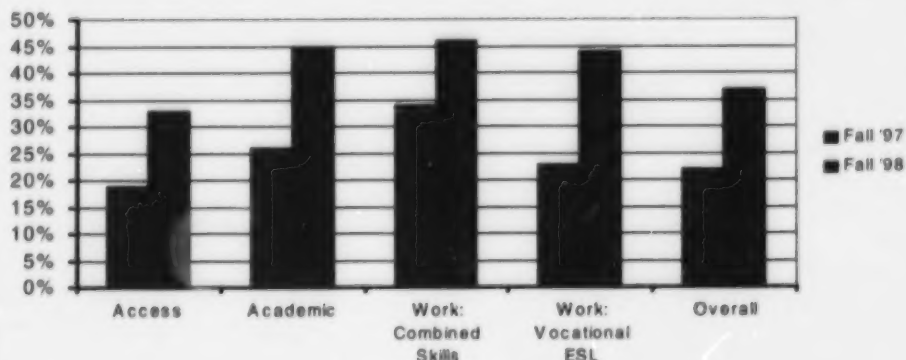
One year after being surveyed, students' reported their English language usage increased significantly.

The amount of time English was used in a typical day rose from an average of 22 percent in Fall '97 to 37 percent in Fall '98.

The amount of English used in a typical day was examined by program type. Students from *Access* programs used English least in both Fall '97 and Fall '98. Students from *Work: Combined Skills* used it most. A marked increase in the amount of time spent speaking English was reported for students across four program types over the year.

WHAT ARE ESL
STUDENTS' PATTERNS
OF ENGLISH USAGE IN A
TYPICAL DAY?

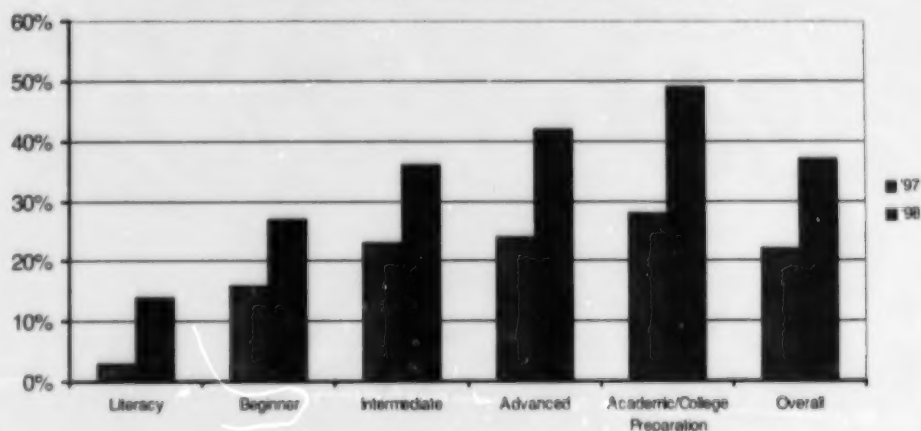
Figure 11
'97-'98 / Increase in English Usage by Program Type



Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

In Fall '98 *Higher level* students reported using English frequently and more often than they had in Fall '97. *Literacy* level programs had the lowest level of English usage in both years and *Academic/College Preparation* level programs had the highest. Students from all five program levels reported increases in the percentage of time they spent speaking English between '97 and '98. The greatest increases were reported by students at *Advanced* or *Academic/College Preparation* levels.

Figure 12
'97-'98 / Increase in English Usage by Program Level



The change in amount of time spent speaking English varied by students' country of birth and first language. Students from East and South East Asia (China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Korea, etc.) increased less than those from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Central or South America and South Asia (India). Students who first spoke Chinese or a South East Asian language had more difficulty learning English.

In both Fall '97 and Fall '98 surveys, students from colleges and institutes located outside the Lower Mainland reported higher levels of English usage than students in the Lower Mainland. Both groups of students reported similar increases in English language usage over the year.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Table 14
Fall '97 - Fall '98 / Reported Increase in English Usage by Country of Birth

	Fall '97 Percent	Fall '98 Percent	Percentage Point Change
Central/S. America	29	56	+27
Europe	24	45	+21
Mid-East/Africa	26	45	+19
South Asia	24	41	+17
China	15	27	+12
Taiwan	17	23	+6
Hong Kong	18	26	+8
Vietnam	22	30	+8
Korea	15	24	+9
Other Asia	39	56	+17
Other(Unspecified)	34	57	+23
Overall	22	37	+15

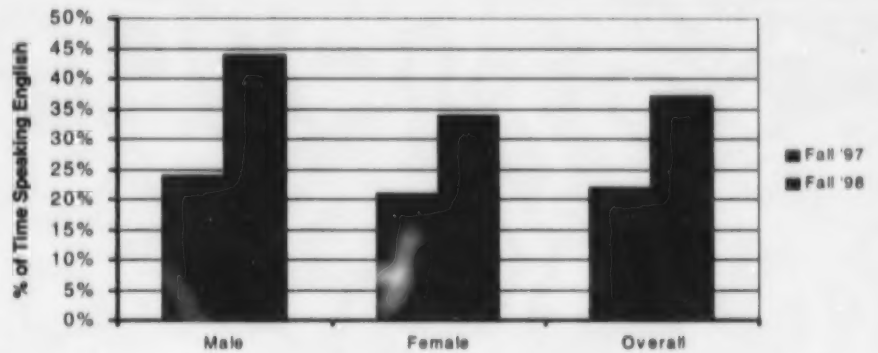
English usage reported in Fall '97 was apparently not related to students' prior education. However, the progress made in the amount of time students spoke English was greater for students with higher levels of education.

Table 15
Fall '97 - Fall '98 / Reported Increase in English Usage by Highest Education Level Attained Before Coming to Canada

	Fall '97 Percent	Fall '98 Percent	Percentage Point Change
Elementary School or none	21	28	+7
Some High School	21	29	+8
High School Graduate	24	38	+14
Some College/Vocational	19	35	+16
College/Vocational Graduate	25	41	+16
Some University	28	48	+20
University Grad./Post Grad.	19	38	+19
Overall	22	37	+15

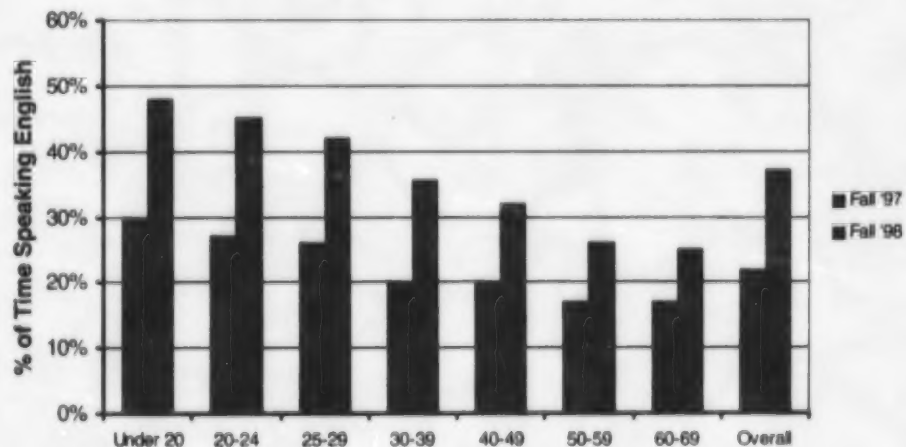
Although there was little difference in the amount of time male and female students spent speaking English in Fall '97, male students reported a greater increase between '97 and '98.

Figure 13
Fall '97 - Fall '98 / Reported Increase in English Usage by Gender



Older students reported lower levels of English usage in Fall '97 and a smaller increase in English usage a year later. In fact, survey results indicates that improvement in the amount of time students speak English steadily declines with older age groups.

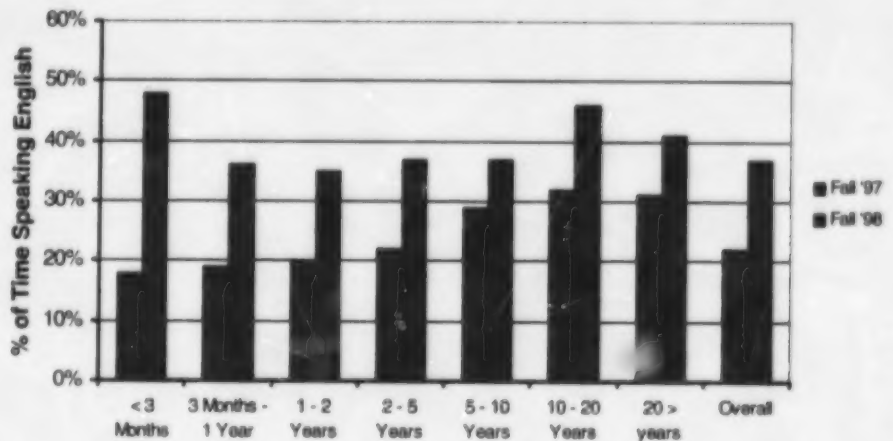
Figure 14
Fall '97 - Fall '98 / Reported Increase in English Usage by Age



Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Not surprisingly, English usage was higher in Fall '97 for students who had been in Canada longer. Those students who had been in Canada less than three months showed a markedly higher percentage point increase in English usage; however, this group of students was relatively small.

Figure 15
Fall '97 - Fall '98 / Reported Increase in English Usage by Time in Canada



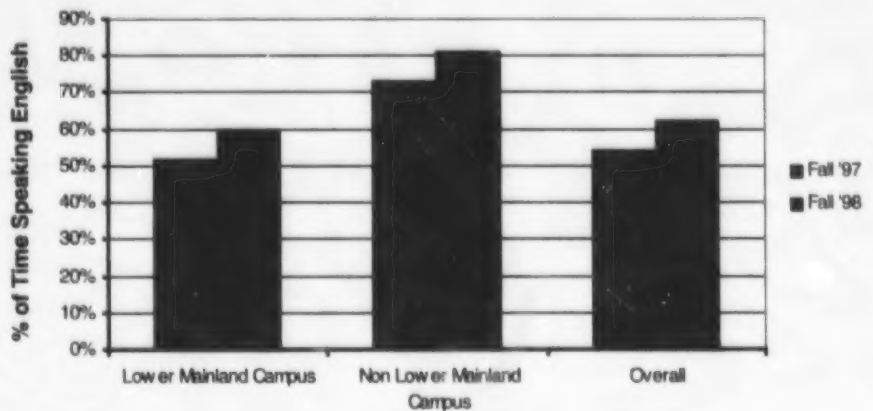
WHAT ARE ESL STUDENTS' PATTERNS OF ENGLISH USAGE AT WORK?

One year after being surveyed, students' English language usage at work increased.

The percentage of time English was spoken at work rose from 55 percent in Fall '97 to 62 percent in Fall '98. These levels are about twice the levels reported by all students for English language usage during a typical day.

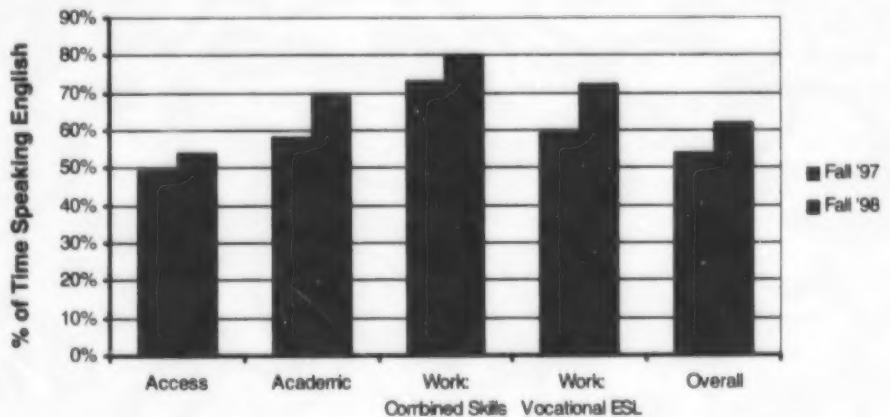
Students who studied ESL outside the Lower Mainland spoke English 73 percent of the time in their workplaces; Lower Mainlanders spoke English 52 percent of the time at their workplaces. Increase in usage was the same for both locations. With such ethnic diversity in the Lower Mainland students may have more opportunities to speak their first languages and need to rely on English less.

Figure 17
Fall '97 - Fall '98 / Increase in English Usage at Work by Campus Location



The percentage of time students spoke English at work varied greatly between program types. English language usage was higher in programs designed to provide work skills, but the percentage point increase was roughly similar across program types.

Figure 18
Fall '97 - Fall '98 / Increase in English Usage at Work by Program Type



Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

How COMFORTABLE ARE ESL STUDENTS USING ENGLISH IN VARIOUS ACTIVITIES?

From a variety of perspectives, students report increased comfort using English in various situations.

In addition to their use of English at school and at work, students were asked to rate their level of comfort using and understanding English in their daily lives as "Always/most of the time", "Sometimes", or "Not very often/never" comfortable. By Fall '98, over 80 percent of students reported being comfortable using English at least "sometimes" in various daily activities. Although the percentages in the "Not very often/never" category remained relatively unchanged from Fall '97 to Fall '98 for each of the activities, the likelihood of students saying they were comfortable "Always/most of the time" as opposed to "sometimes" increased.

Table 16
Fall '97 - Fall '98 / Change in Use and Understanding of English by Daily Activity

	Fall '97	Fall '98	
	% "Always/ most of the time"	% "Always/ most of the time"	Percentage Point Change
Comfort using English			
to talk on the phone	22	42	+20
to talk to sales people in stores	32	59	+27
to talk to your neighbors	29	56	+27
to ask a stranger a question	25	52	+27
to fill in a form	36	59	+23
Able to understand			
an English television program	23	47	+24
an English newspaper	17	37	+20

Students said they improved most when it came to talking to sales people, neighbours and strangers. Talking on the phone and reading newspapers were areas where students felt less comfortable and that they had made relatively less improvement over the year.

It is of interest to note that although students were offered the chance to conduct their interviews in their own language, many chose to do so in English. In Fall '98, 61 percent of the student telephone interviews were carried out in English. Interviewers' ratings of the students' English language speaking skills indicated that 42 percent of interviews were carried out with no or slight difficulty; 35 percent had some difficulty and 23 percent of students had major difficulty.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

In Table 15, changes in English usage were assessed by comparing the percentage of students who were "Always/most of the time" comfortable in Fall '97 to the corresponding percentage in Fall '98. Another way to assess the change is to categorize students by whether their level of comfort increased from Fall '97 to Fall '98. For example, a student who was "Not very often/never" comfortable in Fall '97 but "Sometimes" comfortable in Fall '98 would indicate a positive change. Overall, approximately half of students did not change comfort levels ("Always/most of the time", "Sometimes", "Not very often/never"), while 33 percent made positive changes. These results were similar for all types of daily activities.

Table 17
Fall '97 - Fall '98 / Direction of Change in Use and Understanding of English by Daily Activity

	Fall '97 - Fall '98		
	% Positive Change	% Negative Change	% Unchanged
Comfort using English			
to talk on the phone	33	17	50
to talk to sales people in stores	36	12	52
to talk to your neighbors	37	15	48
to ask a stranger a question	43	15	42
to fill in a form	36	14	50
Able to understand			
an English television program	34	11	55
an English newspaper	32	13	55

In Fall '97, less than thirty-one percent of students reported getting enough practice speaking English outside of ESL class. By Fall '98, this had risen 50 percent.

(QUALITATIVE)
HOW DO ESL STUDENTS EXPERIENCE
LEARNING TO SPEAK
ENGLISH

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Many of the participants in the focus groups admitted that learning English had proved to be more difficult than they had imagined. *I thought I would learn English in six months, maybe a year would be enough, but now it's after three years, and I studied English for years in ____.*

In several of the discussions, participants contrasted the ease with which children learned a second language to the struggle of adults. Adults were said to be too concerned about making mistakes, or thinking too much about grammar, instead of just talking as a child would do. Those who were not surprised by time and effort required had learned another second language as an adult. For a couple of them, the second language was French after first settling in Quebec.

Formal classroom instruction was felt to be necessary to learn to write, but learning to speak often had other influences. The students were quick to mention that individual study is essential for making progress, you can't learn just by attending ESL classes. *Students have to study by themselves, read, watch TV, listen to the radio and try to talk to other people.* However, for many, school was the only place where I have 100% English environment. One person said when he quit ESL, he noticed that his progress deteriorated. He, along with others, couldn't find people to practice speaking with. *The best way for me is the combination of ESL classes and individual work.... studying continues.*

...With a second language we will have to work on it all our lives. Individual work is necessary. 70% must be individual work, 30% is ESL or other classroom instruction.

It's a very hard period of our life... Not only to learn English but other things - to think how to make living. It's very hard, especially for those who have families and children. There is little time to devote to just go to school... I work hard to find job, to learn English, to keep updating with news and all the interests I have... It takes us lots of time, probably twice as much as people from here... In the beginning, there is not so many obvious results. We are trying so, trying so, and there is no results. And if you got disappointed, it is very dangerous.

The most I learned, the less I thought I knew. In the beginning, when I can understood people speaking I will know the language... It takes at least five years of very hard work to learn a language.

ESL is something to start from. You have to do other things too.

I think it depends on the expectation the person. For me, at first when I came here, I was very unrealistic, because I thought in eight months or 10 months, I would be able to speak well enough to work... I never thought that one day I would be able to speak English at the same level I spoke ____, because I knew that doesn't happen with a second language. ... I didn't think it would take so long, and I became frustrated. I wanted to express my ideas at school but couldn't. In my language it was so easy, I could use that rich vocabulary and impress people.

It was the key for my life when I came here... It helped me great to learn English and get through my TOEFL. ... Just go to ____, because they know how to teach you and bring you up, here it is the best material, the best way of teaching that exists...

Some students had imposed certain restrictions on the use of their first language while they learned English, but this appeared to be unusual. *Since I came I made a promise to myself never to read a word in _____. Everyday I read. I read for pleasure, I never go to the dictionary, with time, you will know the meaning.* A couple of students described how they learned to read children's books, then advanced to more difficult material, and a few said they read books to their children. A student said her employer, as well as her ESL instructor encouraged her to speak English at home, and now her family speaks only English for two days a week. Another had tried to speak English at home at the request of her husband who operates a business and wanted to practice, but this lasted for only one day. A family member of another student made a rule that no one could speak their first language at home. This family member had immigrated to Canada years earlier and said, *If you want to get a good job you have to learn the language.*

Getting speaking practice outside of the classroom was hampered by reluctance to engage others in conversation because of embarrassment, an absence of native speakers among their friends and neighbours, and a habit of speaking their first language at home with their families. In nearly every group, students said they were committed to speaking their first language at home, because they didn't want their children to forget it, or because they wanted their young children (some of whom were born in Canada) to learn it. For some, talking to neighbours is not an option, because they live in ethnic neighbourhoods or areas where there is a large immigrant population.

I could hardly adjust myself. I feel lonely with my family in _____. I am ashamed to talk to my neighbour, because I am afraid I'll get mistake the way how I talk... And I will go out as if I am a prisoner with a guard...

We need practice always, and we try to speak English... When I came here I had no English. I try to meet English people to practice. At work, I will speak English to native speakers, but with my own people, I speak (my first language).

...I have no English-speakers friends... I just never met anybody.

Another problem is I couldn't find a native speaker, because they don't like the foreign people usually. I tried to connect with each other, but I felt that they didn't like.

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Because we have a different culture, that's why we can't mix together...

We are adults, not kids - the accent of my three- year- old is perfect - so the only thing that can help us is practice. It worked for me, but it gave me a very hard time. Sometimes I cry because I have to do everything, housekeeping, take care of my son, everything, and lots of problems because I was a newcomer. But I tried and it worked for me... If you keep practicing you learn...

It very difficult for me to find somebody who want to speak with me. I don't have native speaker friends.

I think it depends on your situation. For myself, I have two kids, so I can hardly make it for the course. I would like to do more, but you don't have time to do that unfortunately.

I got used to being here, and I'm not afraid anymore. I was afraid people would reject me because I'm not a native speaker. Talking in class is good for that. Two years ago if you asked me to come to a discussion like this, I would not go. I was too shy. Now it is easier for me.

I was surprised because when we came here I thought, oh, I know English. The more you study, the more you know that you don't know...

Some who said that classroom instruction was the only or main source of learning English worked in first language environments. They said they thought it would be easier to practice and learn quickly if their co-workers spoke English. Several of those looking for work said they were purposely seeking employment in Englishspeaking settings, even though it would probably be easier to find a job in a company where their first language was used. A student who currently works for a Chinese company said she doesn't speak English at work. She hasn't been able to find a job at an English speaking company, although she said she would accept less pay to be able to improve her English.

In each group there was at least one student with excellent speaking skills and at least one other student who had figured out how to get plenty of speaking practice. How they managed this was unique to the individual. In fact, how to practice listening and speaking was an area where the creativity of ESL students was often evident. So how are they getting practice? Social activities provided the solution for some of them. One young student said that socializing with native speakers was primarily responsible for his speaking skills. *I learned 20% conversation skills in class and the rest talking to friends.* He also works in sales and is required to speak English to customers. When he applied for his sales job he said he had to ask another applicant to help him read the application form. His advice to ESL students was to *not hang around with people from their first culture. To make a life here you have to struggle.*

A good solution to getting enough practice for another student was to have only one language in common with your ESL friends. Assuming the responsibility of family interpreter was also evident in this student's comments. Like her, all of the friends of this young student speak a Chinese language, but none speak her particular Chinese language. English is the only language they have in common. This student's parents always use Chinese, but her younger brothers speak English well, so now her parents are now concerned about their sons' ability to speak Chinese. This student is the oldest child and feels *in the middle of these two generations*. When asked, is this role comfortable for you, she replied, *Sometimes it isn't*. She said she serves as interpreter or *represents her family at various functions and deals with the government, school and community people*. She says she uses English more since she lost the ability to use proper Chinese. She confirmed that a lot of the children and youth she sees assuming the role of interpreters for their family do not have good skills in either their first or second languages.

A few said they have native speaker friends, and several had neighbors who would engage them in conversations consisting of more than: "hello, how are you, good bye". One person said she has long conversations three or four times a week with her neighbor. Several said they like to talk to native speakers and have lots of friends to talk to. Some of the younger women said they go shopping to practice English with the sales people. *They ask me, you are a tourist? This is how the conversation starts*. One older student told his group about his unsuccessful attempts to invite neighbors to his house and find volunteer work. He said he talks to canvassers when they knock at his door, just for practice. Another student advised taking courses, such as a diving course, and getting involved in activities. *Go and do things with them. Go hiking, go diving, go jogging, go do anything. They don't care about your English. They will help you with anything. They will help you with English better. I found this when I went to Job Search Club. We went to do picnics, and they were joking. Then I took diving course. You have to do something with English speaking (people). It is the best way if you can't get a job.*

One of the students who had learned most of his speaking skills at work or *from the street* said he is a *good talker but not a good writer*. His writing and speaking skills are not at same level, because he developed most of his speaking ability outside of class, and the use of slang is sometimes a problem in his writing. *If you learn just from work or the street you learn a lot of words, but you can't write them. You need the classroom for proper way. You need it absolutely.*

Using television to improve listening skills was often mentioned. Most said they watched the news, but a few preferred other types of programming. This dialogue took place over the advantages and disadvantages of closed captions. *I used the closed caption on the TV so I can see the words*. The other replied, *If I did that I would just read the screen instead of watching and listening.*

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To which the first person replied, *You have to listen and read and then you can watch the movie. So you have to watch three times, to read it, listen, and watch.* A student says he watches the home and garden programs on TV, because he likes to garden. *Now I just understand gardening language.* For another student, soap operas were ideal for learning English. *In my opinion, the best way to learn from television is soap operas. They speak dialogue, which is great, right? Dialogues are easy to catch... and we have the body language... They speak like normal.*

Talking to oneself in English when alone, going to church, talking to parents at your child's preschool (because they are very language conscious and are trying to speak properly for their children's sake), talking over class assignments with native speakers when taking non-ESL courses, listening to the radio, and calling the Talking Yellow Pages were also mentioned as ways to practice speaking English. *The Talking Yellow Pages, there is lots of information and you can listen for hours. Oh yes, that is a good way to learn. If you don't understand you can try it again and listen. And you know that no one is on the other end and getting frustrated, it is only a recording.* Music was mentioned by a couple of students. *I like music, and ... listening to the words in the music. It's easier to remember the words and it's helpful.* Talking to children was good practice for several students. *I would help my children with their homework. Talking to my children helped me. They learned it so much quicker than me, and they help me to speak right.*

While some said the reason they couldn't find work was because of their lack of English skills, others believed that it was through work that their English improved. One person said friends who came to Canada 20 years ago told her she wouldn't learn English if she stayed at home, but she had been unable to find a job. Another older student didn't plan to work when he came to Canada, but found that work allowed him to practice English. He also talks to people on his daily walks and said he was asked to speak to a grade 6 class about his religion and country. He was pleased that the children understood him and asked him questions.

A few said their volunteer work was a good way to improve speaking skills and gain Canadian work experience at the same time. A couple of the older students said finding volunteer work was almost as difficult as finding a paying job, and they believed this was because of their age. One of them had been on the waiting list for volunteers at a hospital for over a year. He worked for one day at another volunteer placement and was told, *We need somebody to have good communication.*

Discussion groups, discussion clubs, and participating in a language partners program with native speakers were said to be very helpful for acquiring speaking skills. Those who participated in these voluntary programs heard of them from instructors, other students, and notices on campus bulletin boards. Whenever opportunities such as these were mentioned, others in the group appeared to be very interested and did not know these extracurricular programs were organized through their college. The general feeling was that these programs should be expanded and publicity about them should be increased.

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We have conversation corner in ESL program that is once a week. We go to a classroom to talk to one another to improve our speaking. It is really useful for them.

I joined the language exchange program. My partner is a local student. She corrects my pronunciation. Also there is a discussion group with ESL assistant. In the class you have tests and lots of material, and because we are all ESL, might use the wrong word, or if you are a little shy might not get much time to speak in class. I think it helped me a lot.

Conversation partners, they introduced me to a student. I had to meet her each weekend for one hour of conversation. I met this girl for two and a half years ago and now are very close friends. She was very helpful for me too, and I say a special thanks for (the college), because I needed a good friend.

... What really helped was the Community Centre. They had people that would meet with you every Saturday and talk to you and they would help you. I spoke to those people. It was very helpful.

Many of the students who had not heard of these kinds of programs were very interested and said they would have participated if their college organized such a program, or if they had known that such a program was available at their college. In one of the discussions on this topic, a person asked if there was a way that the colleges could also help ESL students find volunteer jobs.

It would be ideal if they could bring at least once a week a group of native speakers to speak with us for one hour. Maybe seniors would want to volunteer for this. They can have coffee time. We could talk together about their culture, our culture.

The ESL department, in my opinion, is not very involved in the college community. ESL students don't have much opportunity to talk to other native speaker students. Some native speakers don't show their interest to speak to ESL students...

The battle against discouragement was discernable in some people, and it appeared that a few of them had retreated from their goal of learning English. ... But life is life. I adjust wherever and do better for myself. I don't think future. Perhaps they were just taking a short break to renew the energy they needed to make the effort, or perhaps at some point the feelings of disappointment in one's progress can turn to a more debilitating depression, especially when combined with culture shock and financial hardship. Certainly, there were people in the groups who sounded like they had definitely decided to enrol again in ESL after quitting several terms ago. A couple of the groups were asked if they keep raising the bar as they learn - does the goal or the standard become higher as your English skills develop? They confirmed that this is what happens. I was surprised because when we came here I thought, oh, I know English. The more you study, the more you know that you don't know... It is discouraging to learn a second language, because you are never there.

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As long as children are talked to and hear speech around them, they acquire a working vocabulary and command of the syntax of their first language seemingly by osmosis. They do not ask themselves, do I know English yet? The adult learning a second language is engaging in a mostly conscious process and continually monitors the signs in the environment that provide feedback on the question, have I learned English yet? Also unlike the child learning a first language, an adult has competency in a first language to use as a yardstick for measuring progress in the second language.

Knowing a language is like automatic pilot in driving – don't have to think about it and don't have to translate.

How do ESL STUDENTS EXPERIENCE LEARNING TO WRITE ENGLISH

Some of the students who planned to pursue academic studies talked about their difficulty with writing. They agreed that writing requires classroom instruction and feedback on mistakes. Unlike speaking, the students felt that instruction was the only way to become competent writers. One person remarked that people don't pay as much attention to mistakes in speaking, but mistakes are very noticeable in writing. Another commented on the amount of writing he had to do for a couple of academic courses he was taking and wished that more time had been spent on learning to write in ESL classes. Still another said that there was a huge jump in the writing expectations between some of levels of ESL, and many students are not prepared. (Students who have only written *short paragraphs* are expected to write *long essays* in their next course, i.e., equivalent of grade 10) Others in this group confirmed that many students failed this next course and felt that there should be more writing instruction in lower levels of ESL. The need for more emphasis on grammar was mentioned in several groups as well.

Some students were fairly pleased with their progress in writing. Advice they gave to others in their group was to stay away from bilingual dictionaries and try to think in English. *Some dictionaries give the wrong explanation, the context decides the meaning.* A student who was learning English as a third language was finding English grammar confusing. *Same sentence, one meaning in the three languages, but the grammar is different, but the position of the subject, object, verb is different in each language.* One student recognized that writing is an acquired skill for everybody when he commented that even people who learned English as a first language make mistakes in their writing that may be obvious to ESL students.

The general view was that writing in English was difficult and very different from writing in their first languages. Of course, writing in any language depends on a sizeable working vocabulary and a good understanding of grammar. However, there may be some other factors accounting for the difficulty of writing in a second language, such as the unfamiliar organization of essays in English. The standard structure of expository writing was said to vary from language to language. Another problem alluded to was subtle, having to do with covert thinking processes, and wasn't easy to describe. It had to do with the interdependent relationship between thinking and writing.

The notion that thinking and writing are closely related is not surprising to anyone who writes, and from time to time in the discussions a student would say how important it is to think in English when writing in English. The obvious aspects of a language's logic are embedded in its grammar. The organization of sentences in a paragraph and the organization of paragraphs in an essay are also aspects of a language's logic, because they provide the parameters for what is regarded as reasoned thinking and writing. Is it ethnocentric to think that there is only one way to reason from points a and b to a conclusion, or are the patterns of reasoned thinking a "wired" human trait that do not vary and are not shaped by culture and language? If language influences the pattern of reasoned thought, then some ESL students may be encountering their main stumbling block in writing in the way they think. In other words, the pattern of thinking required for writing in English has not yet been adopted and has little to do with grammar and even less to do with vocabulary. Perhaps the crux of the matter is in having enough familiarity with a language to be able to think in that language, and thinking in the language will eventually facilitate writing. On the other hand, there may be ways to ease the transition to the style of thinking that characterizes a particular language by using non-writing exercises of some sort.

A thorough analysis of these interesting questions was beyond the scope of this study. There seemed to be a good possibility that something more was going on than unfamiliarity with the language when students spontaneously remarked that thinking or writing in English is different from thinking or writing in their first language. Differences in the patterns of thought as shaped by language may also account for differences in linguistic groups in how readily English is learned.

A student compared the proper way to organize an essay in English and French and said, *French - topic, thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; English - main topic, paragraphs to develop the ideas, and conclusion*. When asked if it seemed like there was a different logic system for writing in different languages, he replied, *Exactly. When you are writing, you are translating... My teacher told me try to think in English, because the sentence will be wrong if I translate.*

The critical thinking is so different, you have to think like a Canadian to write well. You learn the critical thinking by lots of reading, but the ESL student is not there yet. Other languages have their own way of approaching problems. Have to make the format of the structure of the essay in the mind of the student first.

The debates in class, that really helped. I found English hard to learn. The games teacher had us do helped the most. The thinking in English is so different than French. It is not just the grammar... we don't think like that. It is a different culture, and you just have to keep practicing.

In English you have to put your ideas in the main paragraph. You have to start with your idea and put your points and the concluding point. In ____ you elaborate and prepare your reader for your idea in maybe four or five paragraphs, then you come to your main point. The figurative language in English is the ____ (same) style of writing — simile, metaphor.

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Two students who had the same first language did not agree with each other on whether the organization of an essay in English was the same as the organization in their first language. One said, *English is like ____ - topic, then supporting arguments, then conclusion.* He felt he just needed a larger vocabulary and better understanding of grammar to write well. The other student said, *I have the problem to choose the words, because when you write the topic sentence it has to be very strong. For me, it is very hard to choose the words. I choose the similar meaning words but not strong enough, also the... tense is difficult for me too..., no he and she... The topic sentence... to start this way is not easy.*

Most of the students said their writing teachers were quite strict about following the rules for organizing an essay. Some said this was *good, because no one else, another reader, can understand what they have written.* They said sample sentences were useful, and that brainstorming ideas before they started to write was helpful. Teaching the organization of an essay was felt to be adequate by at least one person who said, *We worked on the structure in the first course, so we get used to it.*

The newer style of teaching is not to learn English word by word or through translation, but to first understand the way of thinking of English mind in their daily life. If the ESL student can get that, it will be easier to learn English. A good teacher teaches the English way of thinking, and the English organization of thoughts — that would be the new way of teaching English— that would be the key to learning English.

HOW DO STUDENTS
RATE THEIR OUT-OF-
CLASS EXPERIENCES?

6. Student Knowledge and Use of Campus Services

Students were asked if they were aware of and had used various on-campus facilities at some point during their studies. Of the 89 percent of students who were aware their campus provided computer facilities, 81 percent used the facilities. Seventy-seven percent of students knew their campuses provided counselling services, and 47 percent used the services. Students were least aware (56%) of their campus providing information on other post-secondary institutions. Of those who were aware, 47 percent used the information service.

Table 18
Student Knowledge and Use of Campus Services

	Knowledge and Use of Campus Services	
	% of students who were aware service was available	% of students who knew of the service and used the service
Counselors	78%	47%
Financial Aid Services	74%	55%
Information about other post-secondary institutions	56%	47%
Computers	89%	81%

Some ESL students did not get the information and help they needed from college or institute employees who were not their teachers.

Twenty percent of ESL students reported they "seldom/never" received the information or help they needed from college or institute employees who were not their teachers. Twenty-two percent said they got the help they needed "sometimes".

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

HOW DO STUDENTS FEEL ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH COLLEGE STAFF

When asked about their experiences with non-teaching college staff, some of the students claimed to have had no or few conversations with staff. It was clear from their comments that some ESL students are not getting the information they need, when they need it. Apparently, many ESL students rely on word-of-mouth from other students, family members, or people they know in the community at large. When asked, how did you hear about this, how do you know this, or how did you choose your college, they were more likely to mention someone they knew on a personal basis than any official source of information, such as college personnel, college calendars, or the Ministry. They seemed to be very trusting of the validity of the information they received word-of-mouth, and it could be that in some of their home countries, information from official sources is the least reliable information of all. It is unlikely, however, that family members and people in the community would always have the most up-to-date information on ESL programs, job training programs, prerequisites for further studies, etc.

Those who had interacted with staff were either complimentary or neutral in their evaluations. (Many ESL students do not feel comfortable criticizing anyone in their work capacity.) Sometimes they spoke positively of one person in an office, and said they seek out a particular individual, because they know from previous experience or reputation that this person is patient, listens and tries to understand them, or is *nice*.

They were nice and they speaking slow and they explain really nice. She helps all the people and is always smiling.

All them are good, in administration and the library.

In my opinion, in general here, the service is very good... good management... people are working hard here...

I talked to them (Student Services) a couple of times. They are really helpful. They tell you, this is how we do it here. What do you think, what do you want to do?

A few said they were too shy to ask questions of staff, even when they wanted information about courses, etc. *Sometimes I wanted to talk to them, but I am worried because of my speaking that I can't explain myself clearly. Another said, I know the college has a counselor, but I hesitate because I think my language still is barrier, ... because I don't have confidence in my language, what can you do? I say, I beg your pardon. It's kind of ridiculous, right?*

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A few commented on the helpfulness of staff in financial aid offices. *I used the financial aid, they are very helpful at the office. So did I, it was very easy to understand. They are friendly. I had no problems.* There were people in the focus groups who did not know about financial aid, or said they did not understand how decisions on applications were determined. A couple of them commented on problems with financial aid applications, such as decisions that came too late for them to register for next term.

In several of the groups, students said that college staff does not always know the answers to their questions about ESL programs. The examples they gave included information about new courses, why a course had been cancelled, if a certain course would be offered in the evening next term, when a student would receive word on the status of an application for financial assistance. *I think they advertise things, about new courses, but things change... Students see the new course, pay money, then things change, management decisions... maybe the budget, maybe not enough people for the course. They acknowledged that staff have a lot of people to deal with, they have pressure from the management... and sometimes they don't have answers for questions.*

A student who had analyzed the difficulty of getting information when one's speaking skills are limited, remarked that in this culture you have to ask the right question to get the information you need. Asking the right question can be very difficult for an ESL student, because of language difficulties, but also because they are not familiar with how the education system is organized. He felt that college staff should be aware of the needs of ESL students and be able to anticipate the information they require, even if they don't ask the question that matches the answer.

In my culture when someone goes to some office and have a problem, the people may give a suggestion, but here people don't give nobody suggestion. If you ask directly they give you directly answer, and when somebody comes here (to Canada), he or she doesn't know what kind of question should make to get the right answer. For me I talked to the different people, college employee, but they got too busy, my English was very miserable, so I was not able to get the right direction because they didn't understand my question, because I didn't know the education system and how it worked. ...First of all, the people who should give the direction and advice to the new student... they should feel the feeling of immigrant people... (have empathy, so they understand what information the student needs).

A student in a different group commented that ESL students need different things than other college students. Anyone advising ESL students should know how the ESL courses work and how ESL will prepare them for academic study. It had been his experience that often college staff doesn't have enough information about ESL classes.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

He thought that colleges needed an advisor just for ESL. *ESL are the second level students (second class), because when you talk to somebody you need more time, and they are not patient, or they may not have enough time to take the time to understand.* Another student suggested that it would be helpful to have an interpreter available in the office on certain days.

In one group, students said that 20-minute sessions with advisors were too short to get the information they needed. He suggested holding weekly special information sessions for ESL students with a teacher or counselor in attendance. The time and location of these information sessions could be posted on bulletin boards, and all ESL instructors would tell their classes as well.

Students who had talked to counselors felt they had been advised appropriately. *They guide very properly.* Both teachers and counselors were said to inform students of financial aid and course requirements for qualifying for certain programs. A student who had experienced a fairly serious problem said her teacher did not tell her that a counselling service was available at the college. A student who had used the personal counselling service at one of the colleges was very satisfied with the help she had received. *Just yesterday I phoned Student Services and asked for a meeting to meet my counselor. Today I get the answer. And she apologized for phoning late, but she didn't phone late, because I just phone yesterday. Everything has always been okay. ...As I said I have special advisor, I have special counselor if I have a personal problem. This was very helpful to me to feel comfortable and keep going.*

One student provided details on her unsatisfactory dealings with college staff and had concluded that college staff are not very friendly. Her main problem was the difficulty in reaching by phone the person who could actually help her. *When you go to them with a question, and they say they will look into it and to phone them back. When phone them back all you get is voicemail. If you work, it is hard to make an appointment to speak to a counselor. The secretary usually says so and so is busy or isn't in and sends you to voicemail. You feel so helpless... I want to learn, and I want to get a better job, and I want to improve myself in Canada. It is a totally unfamiliar and strange place as an immigrant... but at the same time the school isn't being very friendly to you. For a long time you won't hear back from them and time matters. Not very fair.*

In summary, their primary expectation from academic counselors and other college staff is to be given more information than they actually ask for. Staff should just assume that ESL students don't always know what questions they should be asking, but they need information that will allow them to plan and organize their busy lives. Many of them won't understand our fairly complex post-secondary system, so they don't know where to start in asking the right questions that will give them enough information to make informed decisions.

Outcomes of BC College and Institute ESL Students

Discussion

In this qualitative section, students expressed some concerns about not receiving the information they need from college staff. Some of the students suggested that this may be because they do not ask for help in quite the right way. Language and cultural interference can make communication with staff difficult. Depending on the institution, ESL learners may be in the minority at a particular campus. In this case, staff may wish to have specific cross-cultural training. In all cases, ESL departments must be careful to keep the front line areas "in the loop" regarding changes to programs or requirements and new offerings. Special information sessions run by faculty or counsellors to provide an overview of ESL programs and registration procedures can also be very helpful.

In the classroom, students can practice asking for information, asking for clarification of information given, rephrasing and listening for main idea and details as part of the curriculum. They can then try out these skills by gathering information from staff at their institution.

7. Further Education

HOW MANY STUDENTS ARE STILL STUDYING ESL IN FALL '98?

Nearly 40 percent of students continue to take some form of ESL a year after originally being surveyed.

In Fall '98, students were asked whether they were still studying ESL at their original college or institute. Thirty-three percent were still enrolled at their original school and five percent were enrolled in ESL at a different college or institute; in most cases students had enrolled at another public college or institute. The remaining sixty-two percent of respondents were no longer taking any ESL training.

WHAT NON-ESL PROGRAMS WERE STUDENTS STUDYING IN FALL '98?

One year later the majority of ESL students are not likely to be taking any non-ESL post secondary courses.

In Fall '98, fourteen percent of students were enrolled in Adult Basic Education or College Preparation programs. Ten percent of students were enrolled in job training courses, and nine percent were taking university level courses.

HOW MUCH TIME DO ESL STUDENTS SPEND STUDYING ESL?

If a student continues to study ESL, they are likely to spend fewer hours per week doing so.

Students who were still studying ESL in Fall '98 spent less time per week studying than in Fall '97. The percent that spent 10 hours or more per week dropped from sixty-seven percent in Fall '97 to 48 percent in Fall '98.

WHY DO SOME STUDENTS STOP STUDYING ESL?

Even though ESL students may feel they need more language development, for a variety of reasons they may not study continuously.

Students gave many reasons for not continuing with their ESL studies in Fall '98. The most common reasons given by approximately 10 to 15 percent of students were that their ESL classes conflicted with their jobs, they had been accepted into a non-ESL program at a post secondary institution or they had simply finished their program or course.

Sixty-nine percent of ESL students plan to study again at some point in the future.

For those who were no longer studying ESL, 71 percent felt that they still needed further English language training. Forty-seven percent predicted they would enrol in additional ESL courses within the next 12 months; most planned on returning to the institution where they did their initial ESL program.

8. Conclusions

The information collected during the Fall '97 and Fall '98 surveys provides a detailed profile of ESL students, their experiences and their accomplishments. **Overall, the public ESL training system is serving them well.** Students are satisfied with their ESL experiences and nearly every student would recommend the program to someone else.

Students who take ESL training come from a wide range of countries and speak a diversity of languages. **They are well educated**, possess considerable job-skills, are older than typical BC college system students, and are more likely female. Most are married with children, and are living and attending school in the Lower Mainland. In addition to family responsibilities, they have to cope with challenges presented by an unfamiliar language and culture. Many ESL students balance jobs with their studies.

People study ESL to better equip themselves for life in Canada, to become better educated, and to become more employable. While younger students focus on furthering their education, older students tend to focus on improving their English for daily life in Canada.

The majority of students choose where to study ESL on the basis of a personal recommendation. If they subsequently change institutions, it is likely for reasons of convenience. One area of concern is that nearly half of all ESL students have to wait before getting into an ESL program: Many students wait longer than three months. However, once enrolled, nearly all students are able to get at least some of the classes of their choice

Students' evaluation of their on-campus and in-class experiences are generally positive, although they identify a need for a greater emphasis on English language speaking skills. The support ESL students receive within the classroom does not always extend outside the classroom; 40 percent of students report that they "seldom" receive assistance from college employees other than their teachers.

ESL students face similar problems as most adults who return to school. Insufficient time to study, worries about finances, lack of encouragement from family members, household duties, and fear of failure are common problems. These reasons may help explain why some students are not likely to continue with their ESL studies. Although many hope to resume their studies, less than half of students surveyed continue to take some form of ESL a year later.

ESL training has a positive impact on students' English language usage, both in daily life and at work. Over 90 percent feel that their training helped "some" or "a lot" with their language skills. They are more comfortable using English in a variety of common situations, and are very likely to make progress towards their goals. Progress is greater for students with higher education levels.

Student satisfaction might increase if certain problem areas are addressed: shortened waiting times to enter programs and a stronger emphasis on speaking skills across all programs and at all levels are two of the most significant areas of concern. **Overall, this analysis of ESL student experiences, from Fall '97 and Fall '98 survey results, indicates that the system is providing the majority of students with the skills they need to achieve their goals.**

Appendix 1: Definitions

Referenced from the BC ESL Articulation Guide

Program Type

Access programs provide students with the language and sociocultural skills to function, participate, and contribute effectively in Canadian society.

Students who have successfully completed level IV of *English for Academic Purposes* will have the language skills necessary to enter Academic, Technology, Career and Vocational programs including those requiring grade 12 prerequisites. They will be capable of functioning effectively in formal, extended, unpredictable, and challenging situations typical of a North American academic environment.

Work: Combined Skills programs integrate the learning of applied skills for specific jobs with language skills to directly prepare students for a particular job or qualification with certification in some cases.

Work: Vocational ESL programs focus on the English language skills for specific areas of employment.

Program Level

The level of the ESL program indicates the demonstrated levels of reading, writing, speaking and listening as outcomes of the program. Details of these can be found at the BC Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology (MAETT) website <http://www.aett.gov.bc.ca/esl/handbook>.

Program Funding Source

Provincial Base programs are funded by the BC Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology.

A limited number of BC public post-secondary institutions receive English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) funding. These funds were realigned in April 1, 1999, from the former federal government's Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program, and is now administered on its behalf by the BC Ministry of Multiculturalism and Immigration.

Full fee payers are domestic students, students who are landed immigrants, refugees or citizens who pay the full cost of their programs themselves

Other funding sources include Human Resources Development Canada which pays for the training in ESL of a small percentage of students, particularly in work-related programs.

Appendix 2: Sources of Bias

In this project there are two main potential sources of bias. The first source is "non-response bias" which arises as a result of failure to obtain responses from all survey participants. The second source is "response-bias" which is bias introduced by respondents' misinterpretation of the survey questions.

In this longitudinal design, non-response bias can be assessed by comparing the characteristics of students who responded to the Fall 1997 survey with those of students who did not respond to the follow-up Fall 1998 survey. A comparison of the 1997 respondents and the 1998 non-respondents shows no significant differences with respect to college or institute, program level, program type, time in Canada, education level, and first language; and only minor differences with respect to gender, age and marital status.

For example, Access programs comprised 58 percent of 1997 respondents and 58 percent of non-respondents in 1998; Academic programs comprised 30 percent of 1997 respondents and 31 percent of 1998 non-respondents; Work: Combined Skills program comprised eight percent of 1997 respondents and seven percent of 1998 non-respondents and Work: Vocational ESL programs comprise four percent of 1997 respondents and three percent of 1998 non-respondents. Thus, in terms of program representation, non-response bias is negligible.

The extent of response bias is difficult to assess. Interviewers indicated that, in Fall 1998, 23 percent of respondents had "major" difficulty understanding the interview. It is likely that many of these students misinterpreted some of the questions. Sixty-eight percent of Fall 98 respondents were interviewed in English and the majority of the remainder were interviewed in their first language using a translated questionnaire. However, interviewers who were fluent in languages for which there was not a translation of the questionnaire were allowed to use these other languages in certain circumstances. They could use other languages to say their introductory remarks, fill in a word or a phrase in the other language if the respondent simply could not understand the meaning in English or in a language for which there was a translation of the questionnaire. In a few instances, the majority of the interview was conducted in these other languages, but only after it was determined that the interview could not continue unless the other language was used. These formal and informal translations may have also contributed to response bias where the original intent of a question was misconstrued through the translation.

Appendix 3: Languages in Groupings

Languages in Group

East Asian: Cantonese, Mandarin, Taiwanese, Japanese, and Korean

European: Croatian, English, French, German, Italian, Polish, German, Spanish, Russian, Romanian

Indo-Iranian: Hindi, Persian, Punjabi, Urdu, Arabic

South East Asian: Filipino, Vietnamese

Other: Unspecified

Appendix 4: Qualitative Study - Methods and Procedures Used with Focus Groups

Study Design

A total of nine focus groups were held between July 24 and August 7, 1999. The groups met in meeting rooms or empty classrooms of the participating institutions during weekday evenings or Saturday afternoons. Staff at the institutions provided assistance in locating meeting places on campus, providing directions, etc. As expected, each of the discussions lasted for one and a half to two hours. An honorarium of \$35 was given to each participant.

Thirty-eight current and former students participated in the study. All but two had immigrated to Canada from other countries. Most of the immigrants had been in Canada or B.C. for two and a half to four years. Several had settled in Quebec and studied French before moving to B.C. The range for length of time in Canada or B.C. was 2 years two months to six years. One of the Canadian-born students was a francophone from Quebec who had lived in B.C. for many years. Chinese was the first language of the parents of the other Canadian-born student. This student said he grew up speaking English and Cantonese equally at home and was taught in English in the B.C. public school system. He said the main reason he was in ESL studies was to improve his writing skills.

Following is a breakdown of participants by their institution of enrolment at the time of the 1997 in-class survey.

Vancouver Community College	8
Off-campus	4
On-campus	4
University College of the Fraser Valley	3
Kwantlen University College	5
Douglas College	5
Capilano College	5
British Columbia Institute of Technology	4
Camosun College	4
North Island College	4

There were 21 females and 17 males in the groups. Their education before coming to Canada ranged from less than high school to a masters degree. All ESL program levels were represented in the groups. Some study participants were still taking ESL, and a few were resuming their ESL studies in September after a break of one or two terms.

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There were also a few who said they would like to resume their English studies in the future. Some students had moved on to regular academic courses or job training programs. The majority considered their formal English studies to be finished, and some of them had quit before they wanted to or felt they should.

The countries from which they had immigrated included India, China, Republic of China (Taiwan), Hong Kong, India, Korea, Philippines, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Morocco, Cameroon, former Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, Ukraine, and Portugal.

Most of the participants were employed before coming to Canada. They had worked in fields such as forestry, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, architecture, travel/tourism, transportation, sales, health care, computer programming, computer hardware and software development, arts and culture, sports, clerical, food service, civil service, labourer (roofer), financial management, accounting, farming, drafting, child-care, elementary education and teaching and research at the post-secondary level.

Nearly all had studied English before coming to Canada, and it was not unusual for them to say they had studied the language for many years in the public school system or university of their home country. It was also typical that the emphasis of their former English studies had been reading, grammar and writing. None of them felt they had good speaking skills when they came to Canada, regardless of the number of years they had studied English before they immigrated. A participant originally from Korea said that there had been an increased focus on teaching speaking skills in that country only recently. As one participant said, *It is very different when you study English in an English environment.*

Participant Criteria and Recruiting Procedures

The desired characteristics of focus group participants were identified, and a recruiting script was written. The criteria for overall group composition were: one-half to two-thirds females, a range of first cultures/ first languages, a variety of program levels (as recorded at the time of the in-class survey), differing levels of formal education, a variety of job types before coming to Canada, married and single individuals, and some with children and some without children. International students enrolled at the participating institutions were excluded from the study.

Current and former students who had participated in the phone survey in the fall of 1998, were phoned by Points of View interviewing staff, administered a screening questionnaire and, if they met the desired characteristics of study participants, they were invited to a focus group session. The attendance of those who agreed to participate was then confirmed with a letter and a reminder phone call a day or two before the date of their focus group.

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In general, the students who were contacted for the focus groups were interested in the study. Those who declined the invitation to participate usually had a very good reason, citing conflicts between the meeting time and other obligations.

Discussion Guide

A discussion guide was written to cover the topics of interest as defined by a small task group of the Steering Committee. The discussions frequently departed from the sequence of the topic outline on the guide, and the emphasis on individual topics varied from group to group. The approach taken by the moderator was to allow each participant to tell their "stories" in their own words and not artificially impose a question and answer format for the discussions. The discussion guide may be found in the Appendix.

Data Quality

The participants were candid in their comments, and many disclosed very personal information about themselves during the discussions. They appeared to be interested in the study and appreciative of the opportunity to talk about their experiences. Some expressed strong feelings about events and situations that had affected them. The full range of human emotions was expressed over the course of the study. One of the objectives of the research was to elicit data about students' problems, fears and hopes - subjects that many people would be reluctant to talk about in a telephone survey. The informality, flexibility and person-to-person conversation style of focus groups were ideal for creating situations where ESL students felt comfortable talking about the things that were on their minds and close to their hearts.

Some language difficulties were encountered - mainly that the speaker's vocabulary was insufficient to express a certain concept or complex idea in English. A remarkable range of competency in speaking English was evident in the groups. There were a few startling examples of students who spoke fluently, using large vocabularies and with barely a trace of accent. Others struggled to express themselves using simple sentences or phrases with a very limited choice of words. Even so, the data were very rich, and the results were interpretable. By intermediate level, most ESL students have the listening and communication skills to actively take part in this highly verbal method of research.

A qualitative method was chosen for the study, because this group of research methods provides flexible means of obtaining primary information from members of a population of interest. Focus groups are particularly useful for topics where the nature, range and intensity of responses are unknown. These methods are used when it is important to uncover the motivation underlying behaviour and the feelings associated with experiences. Qualitative research typically yields detailed information on the topics investigated.

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It must be remembered, however, that the results of qualitative research are not quantifiable conclusions and cannot be used to estimate the size of any subgroup identified in the population for the study. The findings discussed in this report were drawn from a small group of current and former English as a Second Language students of eight public post-secondary institutions in British Columbia.

Appendix 5: Discussion Guide Used With Focus Groups

I. Introduction

- A. Introduce facilitator
- B. Explain purpose
- C. Inform of audio-taping
- D. Sign consent forms
- E. Advise of ground rules

no right or wrong answers

your opinions and ideas are important

TURN ON RECORDER

- F. Participants introduce each other
 - i. First name
 - ii. First language
 - iii. How long have you been in Canada?
 - iv. Did you know some English before you came to Canada?
 - v. Who is taking an ESL class now?

II. Expectations of Life in Canada

Lead-in: Do you remember thinking about Canada before you came here?

- A. What did you think life in Canada would be like?
- B. How is life in Canada the same as what you thought?

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C. Is life in Canada different from what you thought?

i. (If so), how is it different?

D. Is there anything you wish you had known about Canada before coming here?

E. How did your life change when you came to Canada?

F. What were your plans when you came to Canada?

G. Are you doing what you planned to do?

i. (If not), how did your plans change?

ii. (If not), why did your plans change?

H. What are your plans for the future (e.g., job, more studies)?

i. Do you think you will do this (the plan)?

ii. Do you think you will have trouble doing this?

iii. (If so), why?

iv. (If so), what would help you?

III. Accessing ESL Classes

A. How did you know where to take ESL classes?

B. Where else did you get information about ESL classes?

C. Did you get the information you needed? Was there anything you wish you had known?

D. Did anyone help you choose your classes?

i. (If so), who helped you?

ii. (If so), how did they help you?

iii. (If so), did you get enough help?

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- E. Did you have trouble getting the class you wanted?
 - i. (If so), please tell me about this (why couldn't you take this class, how long did you wait, how big a problem was this for you, etc.)?
- F. Did you get other information from the college (financial aid, other programs, other colleges, career counselling, etc.)?
 - i. Who did you speak to (in person, over the phone)?
 - ii. Was it easy to get this information? Did you get the information when you needed it?
- G. Were the people who work in the office helpful?
 - i. Were the people who give advice to students helpful (counselors, advisors)?
- H. How could the college have been more helpful to you?

IV. Expectations of ESL Classes

- A. (Before you took ESL), what did you think ESL class would be like?
- B. Was ESL different from what you thought?
 - i. (If so), what was different from what you thought?
- C. Has it been easy or difficult to learn English?
 - i. Why do you say that?
 - ii. What would help you?
- D. What has been the hardest part of learning English for you (not enough time to practice, had to miss classes because of work, not enough money)?
- E. What has helped you learn to speak English?
 - i. Did you practice speaking English outside of ESL class? How much did you practice speaking outside of class?
 - ii. Who did you practice speaking to?

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iii. How did you meet these people (at the college, community groups, agencies)?

iv. Did you need help to meet people?

v. (If so), what (who) could help (ESL class, college, etc.)?

F. Have ESL classes helped you?

i. (If so), how have they helped you?

ii. What has been most helpful?

G. How could ESL class be improved? What did you like/not like about ESL class?

H. If you could plan (design/develop) an ESL class/course that was perfect (just right) for you, what would it be like (describe it)?

I. Did you have an English teacher who was a very good teacher (the best teacher)?

i. What was this teacher like (describe him or her)? Why was this teacher the best?

J. Did you feel a part of the college (like other students) while taking ESL?

i. Why do you say that?

ii. (If not), is there anything the college or ESL program could do to make ESL students feel like they are part of the college?

V. Learning English and Work/Learning English and Family Responsibilities

Lead-in: Who had a job while they went to ESL class?

A. Did you need to know English to work?

i. (If so), did ESL class help you with English for work?

ii. Could ESL be improved (made better) to help you with English at work?

iii. (If so), how could ESL be improved?

B. What is it like to work (go to a job) and take ESL (at the same time)?

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Lead-in: Who was taking care of a family while they went to ESL class?

C. What is it like to take care of a family (children) and take ESL?

- i. Is coming to a class the best way to learn if you are very busy with a job or taking care of a family? Would you like to learn English on the computer – CD-ROM, Website, or some other way?

VI. Switching ESL Provider

Lead-in: Has anyone taken ESL at more than one college (school)?

A. (If so), where have you taken ESL?

- i. Why did you take ESL from two colleges (schools)?

B. (If so), was one better for ESL?

- i. (If so), what was better?
- ii. If your first college had that, would you have stayed there?

VII. Wrap-up

A. Do you think you need to take more English classes?

- i. (If so), do you plan to take more English classes?
- ii. Why do you say that?

B. What has helped you the most in learning English (teachers, family, co-workers, English-speaking friends, neighbors)?

C. Is there anything more you want to say about learning English (ESL class)?

D. Moderator's concluding remarks and thank you.

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MORE INFORMATION

The Centre for Education Information currently manages a number of distinct projects which measure Student Outcomes in British Columbia's post-secondary and K-12 education system. The goal of these projects is to collect and disseminate information that can be used to analyze former students' employment and further education outcomes after leaving their programs and their satisfaction with the education they received.

If you would like more information on Student Outcomes Reports, please contact the Centre for Education Information at 250-413-4400

Student Outcomes Reports are available on-line at

www.ceiss.org/edresearch